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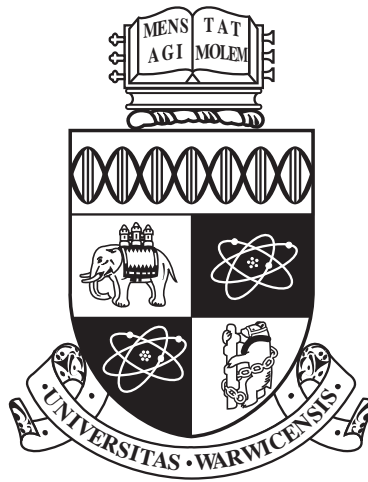
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# **Intentionalism as Metacriticism: A Reassessment of the Intentional Fallacy**

by

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## *Declaration*

The author confirms that this is his own work, is not a product of collaboration, and has not previously been submitted for another degree.

## *Abstract*

In 1946, Monroe C. Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt published an article, “The Intentional Fallacy,” which objected to the critical practice of treating claims about an artist as claims about her work. Thus was inaugurated what today is known as the intentionalism debate. I begin by offering a certain conception of the debate—not quite a novel conception, for it corresponds more or less to what Beardsley and Wimsatt took themselves to be doing, but one which, in recent decades, has increasingly been supplanted by something very different. I argue for the priority of this original conception, which is concerned primarily with the language and norms of criticism, over the more recent conceptions which focus on analyses of meaning. I then propose a view which defends the artist’s relevance against the objections of Beardsley and Wimsatt, so understood. The interest of my view lies in its circumvention of what many have (incorrectly) thought essential to the position to which Beardsley and Wimsatt were objecting.

## *Preface*

It hardly needs stating that there would be no artworks were there no artists, and no artists were there no artworks. But many have felt that more needs to be said, something about how facts about the artist have some sort of *special relevance* to what a work means. It is, after all, *the artist's* work. Should not the artist, then, be shown some sort of deference?

This indeed is how many of us, including professional critics, tend to talk about works, at least on certain occasions. When we find ourselves perplexed by something in a work, our instinct is to ask, “what did the artist mean to do here?” The same, incidentally, is true when we are perplexed by what someone has said in conversation: we are inclined to ask, “what did you mean by that?” Is it, then, proper to treat artists with respect to their works as we do people with respect to what they have said?

Of course, it is usually very difficult to get artists to explain themselves, not least because artists are usually not around to take questions. But even when they *are* around—when one has the opportunity to ask an artist a question about one of her works—it is not clear what “authority” should be given to their answers. We might think, perhaps too cynically, that if the inquirer likes the answer he will be disposed to give it authority and thereafter to cite it as some sort of proof or validation of his previous suspicions, and that if he dislikes it he will be disposed to treat it very differently, as having no authority at all with respect to a work that, he will believe, “stands on its own.”

But there remains something curious, despite (or perhaps because of) this cynical assessment, about the fact that we perform such a dance around the artist but not really around other people or things. For it sounds like something of an accomplishment to *deny* that the artist has any sort of authority. This could



only be because there is some nagging intuition that pulls us in the direction of giving the artist some such authority in the first place, however irrational we may take this intuition to be on reflection.

There is a debate in the philosophy of art which studies such intuitions. One side, intentionalism, treats an artwork as in some sense the *product* of an artist, and on such grounds argues that properly understanding or analyzing its meaning requires giving some kind of “special attention” to the artist. The other side, anti-intentionalism, disagrees, believing that, though artworks are surely in *some* sense the products of their artists, this does not entail that facts about the artist must be given any such “special attention.” The disagreement admittedly sounds vague. In the chapters to come I will attempt to clarify what is really at stake in it, but the clarification will come against an acknowledgement that, as things stand, there is considerable uncertainty about the terms of the debate, about who is arguing for what and against whom.

I have two overarching aims. The first is to develop what I call a “metacritical” conception of the debate, one that is at odds with what I will call a “semantic” conception. I will argue that the former reflects the origins (and true nature) of the debate, while the latter is the condition into which the debate has devolved over the years, largely to its detriment. My second aim is to argue for intentionalism under the former conception, of metacriticism, for this is the only conception under which I think the debate may be won by the intentionalist.

I do much of the stage-setting in the first chapter, in which I describe, among other things, an opposition between a *criticism-first* approach, which I go on to adopt, and a *meaning-first* approach, which, in the second chapter, I characterize as being in evidence in much of the contemporary literature. I also, in the second chapter, raise some problems facing contemporary intentionalism, problems which I believe are significant but have not received sufficient attention.

In the third chapter, I argue for a theory of meaning, the value-maximization theory, that is standardly regarded as inimical to intentionalism—as, indeed, an *anti*-intentionalist theory. I spend some time differentiating a possible meta-critical intentionalism from this “lower-level” theory of meaning, with which it may be seen to be not only consistent but so eminently compatible as to facilitate, as I detail in the fourth chapter, a major theoretical benefit, namely

that of justifying the relevance of intentions to evaluation (which has been a stumbling block for intentionalists). In the fifth chapter, I more fully articulate the particular sort of metacritical theory I am advocating, bringing together the rudiments I describe in the third chapter and the links with evaluation I develop in the fourth.

The position that emerges is one which, I hope, answers the anti-intentionalist in terms both more satisfying and more plausible, more difficult to assail in neutral territory, than the answers that intentionalists have been giving in recent decades, during which an unhealthy sort of complacency seems to have set in. It is surprising to notice that there are hardly any anti-intentionalists around these days (or that opposition to intentionalism is rarely self-identified as such). One reason for this may be that intentionalists have won the day, another that the debate is dying a quiet and miserable death, starved of what nourished it in those acrimonious early decades. I take the latter line, and, to revive some of the early fire and vigour, take sides, in a number of local skirmishes, with the anti-intentionalists, many of whose claims I find not only plausible but, more importantly, unnecessary to refute in order to vindicate intentionalism.

## CHAPTER I

### *The Debate*

Sensible people are now beginning to hedge on their earlier acceptance of this view, very rightly, so they explain (with tender humour and so forth) that nobody ever intended the crude interpretation evidently held by outsiders and students; the esoteric doctrine held by professors allows a tolerable freedom. We have heard this kind of thing before. The crude doctrine is what does all the harm, whatever the Intention may have been; and whether or not the high priests imagine they are above it makes no difference.

– William Empson<sup>1</sup>

A curious feature of the intentionalism debate is that both sides have “hedged” from the very beginning, so much so that Empson, in the above quote, could equally well be describing either (though he happens to be talking about anti-intentionalism). When one looks at the history of the debate, as I do in this chapter, one ends up finding more sheepish agreement than one would expect. Part of the problem surely lies in Beardsley and Wimsatt’s original article, much of the interest and provocation of which comes at the expense of the sort of programmatic detail that is typically expected of founding documents. It is not clear that they expected their work to be so taken, as a founding document. Very likely they approached it as one among many shots across the bow of what they regarded as the ailing vessel of biographically-oriented criticism. Their chief contribution, certainly in retrospect, was to narrow the biographical terms

1. “The Intentional Fallacy, Again.” 1973. *Essays in Criticism* XXIII (4): 435.

of interest to a singular one, that of intention, and this itself has created as much confusion as clarity.

There is another reason, not unrelated to the latter. A certain historical shift, precipitated in 1967 by the appearance of E. D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* and consummated in 1992 by a landmark collection of essays, *Intentions and Interpretation*, described a movement, rarely conscious on any given occasion, away from the philosophical terrain in which Beardsley and Wimsatt wished to conduct their discussion, a terrain made hospitable by the blandishments of the ordinary-language philosophy that thrived at the time of their writing, and toward different terrain, shaped by the return to metaphysics that characterized analytic philosophy in the 1970s. While I will not be getting into these background philosophical trends, which only added to existing uncertainty about the terms of the debate, I do think they are relevant to the ways in which individual philosophers conceived of problems, what they took to be the philosophical tools at their disposal—not, as it were, in a vacuum but as members of a profession susceptible to intellectual fads and fashions.

My aim in this chapter is to sift out a pressing question about intentions from the history of the debate. Due to the breadth and variety of the literature I focus on a select few writers whom I take to be representative of broader patterns, in an attempt to construct a certain historical narrative of the debate that foregrounds my own concerns. The chapters to follow will address the question at which I arrive.

### 1.1 *A Brief History*

As with most philosophical debates, one can reach back indefinitely into the past to find points of origin, eventually reaching Plato (and perhaps beyond, if one is industrious enough). In my view, the intentionalism debate really begins with Beardsley and Wimsatt even though one is within one's rights to perform the mentioned historical exercise. Doing so is not to my purpose, but, because they indeed did not emerge *ex nihilo*, because many of their interests had antecedents and some of these antecedents are relevant to the shape the debate went on to take, I begin a little before Beardsley and Wimsatt, in particular with two aspects

of what we now call intentionalism which Beardsley and Wimsatt synthesized in their definition. One is represented by the fashion of biographically-oriented criticism, popular but already under attack in the decade before Beardsley and Wimsatt's writing. The other is represented in an under-appreciated debate between C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, which has filtered through into a niche of the contemporary debate, the "conversation" view, that I will properly take up in my final chapter.

After mentioning these two antecedents, I offer a treatment of what Beardsley and Wimsatt were up to, the terms they set for the debate, and then rehearse some noteworthy contributions that were made between 1946 and Hirsch's intervention in 1967. This is all the history I cover here, reserving more recent material for subsequent chapters, for here I am interested simply to define the thesis of intentionalism and to describe what it would take to demonstrate it to be true.

It may seem odd that I am restricting myself to the pre-1967 era even for these tasks, but really very little has been said since then on the definition question. The situation is dire if one thinks, as I do, that some more tangible connection to the origins of the debate is needed for it to still count as the same debate. I believe that it should so be counted, if only for reasons of historical continuity. This is why I find it useful to derive the terms of the debate precisely from its origins, from Beardsley and Wimsatt and their contemporaries. Others may believe that we are no longer having the same debate, but it does not seem to me that anybody has bothered even to ask the question. So I take it for granted that we wish not only for there to be a debate, but for this debate to answer the terms set forth by Beardsley and Wimsatt.

### *1.1.1 Pre-Beardsley and Wimsatt*

Much of the pre-Beardsley and Wimsatt literature has a distinct flavour of questioning (and hoping to account for) the very possibility of properly experiencing works from the past which issued from cultures and societies very different from our own. It is not necessarily a temporal issue, for the same could be said of contemporary works from cultures with which we happen to be

unfamiliar, but temporality seems nevertheless to have been made the issue. Louis Teeter, one of these early theorists, describes the problem as follows:

Due to the very terms of our existence in a world of change there are two sets of data concerning a past work of literature which one may propose to investigate and formulate: its probable meanings and values to the author and his contemporaries and its possible meanings and values to the present day reader. (1938, 173)

Teeter goes on to offer a solution in terms of a “relationship [which] may be discovered between the two sets of values of such a nature that the present while asserting its own validity may be controlled and enriched by the past.”<sup>2</sup> What is important for my purposes, more than Teeter’s solution, are the terms in which he frames his investigation. He begins by differentiating the “historical” impulse of the “literary scholar” from the “revaluati[ve]” one of the “critic.” His main question is: how should *we* understand a work of art? What disciplinary resources are appropriate? While he is not unconcerned with the notion of “meaning,” he appears to relegate it to secondary status. The work means whatever *we*, using the right discursive practices, should take it to mean. The alternative, which I will argue is adopted by Hirsch and most of his successors, is to give priority to the notion of meaning, to the question: what does the work *mean*? In *virtue of what* does it bear this meaning? Under this alternative, the question about discursive practices is given secondary status: the right discursive practices are any which lead us to what a work *does* mean.

I will elaborate on this difference, and why it matters, in due course. For now I continue by mentioning another contributor to the pre-Beardsley and Wimsatt literature. Harold Cherniss, writing in 1943, questions the historical impulse that Teeter takes somewhat for granted. But Cherniss, too, begins with a disciplinary distinction, between “history” and “the study of literature.” The historian

is concerned to comprehend the individuality of a work of art only in order that he may eliminate it and so extract for use as historical

2. I will follow a convention of omitting subsequent members of consecutive citations of the same page number from the same source (unless they are demanded by reasons of clarity).

evidence those elements which are not the private creation of the author. The student of literature, on the other hand, studying the same text is interested in it as a separate and unique phenomenon; his interest in the common elements which it contains is in turn a kind of interest of elimination, for he is concerned with the manner in which they have been individualized by the artistic form. ([1943] 1999, 148)

The suggestion here, which Cherniss goes on to confirm, is that the proper way to understand a work is determined by operative disciplinary norms. Using one of Thucydides's works as an example, Cherniss describes how it "presents an object of study to three different disciplines" (history, historiography, and literature). To treat the work as literature is to interpret it as a student of literature should, where this task is defined disciplinarily.

But disciplines frequently interact, and, indeed, there is a historical impulse felt even by students of literature:

A work of art is produced at a definite time, in a definite place, and for an audience which itself has certain tastes and conventions, accepted ways of thinking, and a common store of knowledge and belief... Must one not, then, in order to understand a literary production, make oneself a member of that original audience to which it was addressed, learning what they knew, thinking and feeling as they thought and felt and therewith acquiring the ability to slough off one's own environment, knowledge, and tastes so far as they are at variance with those others? (150)

Cherniss extensively satirizes this attitude. Not only must an adequate reader have mastery over all the mentioned information, but, because "the work of art itself was produced by only one among all these men [the author's contemporary audience]," "[t]o him alone, the individual author, is due the artifact in its individuality" (151). An enthusiastic advocate of such thinking is quoted as saying that an interpreter does not "completely understand [an author's words] if he does not understand the soul from which they come. He must be the interpreter of his soul also." Extending this "point of view," Cherniss reaches

what he takes to be an absurd conclusion, that “[e]ven the sale of Milton’s house, the number and character of Euripedes’ wives may have been important factors in the lives of the artists and so in the nature of their literary productions” (152).

Cherniss is what we would now call an anti-intentionalist.<sup>3</sup> His views are indeed very similar to what would come to be Beardsley and Wimsatt’s, in particular with respect to what he calls the “independent existence” of the work. But he also introduces ideas that they do not take up. His reason for dismissing the mentioned historical impulse is partly that “theoretical knowledge, however exact and complete, is not the immediate perception which only those can have who are themselves part of this environment [in which the work was produced]” (153). Namely, it is one thing to accumulate facts about the past, another to imaginatively occupy the corresponding circumstances in the manner that the artist’s contemporary audience did. Cherniss also doubts “the tacit assumption that the sum of biographical incidents constitutes the [artistic] personality,” even if we decide that we must “address ourselves to the history of that personality” (155). The former idea, concerning the difference between “theoretical knowledge” and “immediate perception,” is relevant to a crucial difference in styles of approaching the intentionalism debate, one which I will elucidate as I proceed. The second idea, about what “constitutes” artistic personality, is richly explored in Lewis and Tillyard (1939), to whom I now turn.

The debate between Lewis and Tillyard concerns a subject that is given scant attention in contemporary intentionalism, the idea that works put artists into contact with their audiences. Lewis calls it the “personal theory,” and I draw from his attacks three separate targets. First, that “to read poetry means to become acquainted with the poet, as we become acquainted with a man in intimate conversation” (1). Second, that poetry is “the expression of personality,” such that “the end which we are supposed to pursue in reading it is a certain contact with the poet’s soul” (1-2). Third, that “what we attend to, in reading

3. He occupies a position that Teeter characterizes as committed to “platonic essences, universal human nature, the self-sufficiency of art, etc.” (1938, 175). Thus Cherniss says that the work “has significance for all men as men in all times and places . . . the basis of [which] significance is a set of ideas, emotions, and values which thus far in the history of the civilized world at least have always been recognized as having validity beyond the arbitrary taste of any individual or the customs of any locality” ([1943] 1999, 158).



poetry, is a representation claiming to be the poet; and that to read poetry well is to have a true idea of the poet" (4). These claims seem related, for the "contact" mentioned in the second may well be the "acquaintance" mentioned in the first. But they are logically distinct, for it might be that an important element in appreciating poetry is one's getting acquainted with the poet even if it is not the case that one *attends* to the poet in the very act of reading.

Lewis makes an interesting concession: "Let it be granted that I do approach the poet; at least I do it by sharing his consciousness, not by studying it" (11-12). It is a strategic concession in that it eliminates a certain type of personal theory, namely that which insists, as the third one above seems to, that to properly experience a work is to attend to its artist. Lewis believes that one "looks with [the artist's] eyes, not at him," that "[h]e, for the moment, will be precisely what I do not see; for you can see any eyes rather than the pair you see with." In other words, it is only by inference from what I see that I come to learn something about the artist; but such inferences are "unpoetical results," not part of "my poetical experience." (Note the raising of a difference between experience and what is extra-experiential.)

But if this eliminates the third type of personal theory, it may open the door to the first or the second, for one might think that seeing with the artist's eyes is a promising way to become acquainted with him, or to come into contact with his soul, even if he is not directly encountered, as a figure, in what one thereby sees. Lewis seems to treat such acquaintance as one which can only be delivered *in* a work, but perhaps there are other ways for it to be delivered *by* the work, namely as a concomitant effect of experiencing the work a certain way. (I give attention to various such possibilities in the coming chapters.)

One of the points of disagreement between Lewis and Tillyard concerns, in Cherniss's terms, what "constitutes" the relevant personality. Cherniss is doubtful that amassing biographical information is the right way to approach personality, for it assumes a certain "psychophysical mechanics," treats the human as "a mechanical combination of events and influences" and ignores the fact that "no reconstruction, however complete, of the external incidents of a man's life can reproduce or reveal the essence of the man himself" ([1943] 1999, 155). This brings into relief the way in which the question about biographical

information and the one about the personal theory may lead in different directions. For if the subject of the former is the sort of historical inquiry I have described above, and that of the latter is contact with a personal “essence,” then they would seem to concern different issues—the former, discursive practices, and the latter, the experience of works.

Lewis and Tillyard’s discussion, which proceeds in a helpfully systematic fashion, demonstrates this difference. Lewis instigates by questioning whether there is anything stable or worthwhile to “get in touch with,” over and above the artwork that lies before one. He considers that “the poet is a man who habitually sees things in a special way, and that his metaphor and other technique are simply *means* by which he admits us to share for a moment what is normal with him” (1939, 22). Using Keats’s *Hyperion* as an example, in which there is a metaphor relating trees to senators, Lewis acknowledges that this is a way of “seeing trees,” but argues that “Keats could not have seen his trees as we see them in reading *Hyperion* before he thought of the senators. To ask, then, whether he normally saw them thus is simply to ask whether he normally associated them with the senatorial idea” (23). This Lewis thinks he did not, for a poet’s words do not “come for the asking, are rare and wooed with hard labour, are by no means the normal furniture of the poet’s mind, are least of all his own possession, his daily temper and habitual self.”

Tillyard offers some resistance to this last claim by alluding to “something established in [Keats’s] mind ready to welcome the senators when they presented themselves to him,” but he, too, wishes to exclude from consideration precisely those “accidents, such as toothache, irregular habits, or an uncertain temper, which interfere with our enjoying this distinguished mental pattern of his,” which, “though subject to change,” is “definite enough to be called habitual,” Keats’s “normal self” (35). Lewis counters by rebuking Tillyard for his “purified, underlying, expurgated version” of personality (53). The so-called accidents are in Lewis’s view indispensable, without which Keats would not be Keats.

What exactly, one might be asking, is the disagreement here? Lewis is very defensive of personality, feels that making it fit for purpose as an object of artistic scrutiny “is an insult. It is to make of a man a mere thing, a spectacle” (65). Tillyard, meanwhile, presses the importance of attending to personality,

even if this means expurgating certain “accidents” which do not make up the “mental pattern” to which we must attend.

I suggest that Lewis is addressing himself more to the subject of experiencing artworks, and Tillyard more to that of criticism. Lewis does not think one should be attending to the artist in *experiencing* a work. Tillyard thinks that one should be attending to the artist in *interpreting* a work. These are consistent views, even if Lewis would likely extend his claim to the subject of criticism and Tillyard his to that of experience. Even so, their convictions would not withstand such extension. Being (in the relevant sense) permitted to use biographical information in criticism is not an indication that one will be able to acquaint oneself with the artist by experiencing the work. Nor does the mere possibility of such acquaintance settle anything about what information it is legitimate (or simply prudent) for a critic to use.

Lewis and Tillyard conflate these issues, in ways that many of their contemporaries do not (for instance, Teeter and Cherniss). That Beardsley and Wimsatt follow suit, as I will show in the next section, is one of the reasons that the debate went on to take the shape that it did, of somewhat eliding the distinction.

### 1.1.2 *Beardsley and Wimsatt*

Much has been written on Beardsley and Wimsatt’s article. My focus for the moment will be on their conception of the debate (an under-examined subject). I begin with the notion of *intention*, which they simply assume is the term of interest to their opponents. In fact, this was not true at the time of their writing, and has only become so due to their influence. Their opening sentence reads: “The claim of the author’s ‘intention’ upon the critic’s judgment has been challenged in a number of recent discussions, notably in the debate entitled *The Personal Heresy*, between Professors Lewis and Tillyard” (1946, 468). As may be evident from my discussion, however, Lewis and Tillyard care little specifically about intentions (they speak in the first instance of personality). The same is true of Teeter, who is also cited by Beardsley and Wimsatt; his concerns are more generally historical. So there is something strange about Beardsley

and Wimsatt's decision to focus on intentions, in particular about their sense that it is something to be taken for granted. Either they did not realize that they were changing the terms of the debate, or else they were being somewhat disingenuous.

What, in any case, do they mean by "intention"? It is common to ascribe to them the view, using their own words, that intention is "design or plan in the author's mind" (469). This is an explicitly mentalistic definition, offering little detail about the specific mental entity that is meant, and often faces objections on these grounds. It is said that Beardsley and Wimsatt go wrong in their view by having too simplistic a notion of intention, either too simplistic a mentalistic notion or too simplistic in its being mentalistic at all.

I think such objections are misleading. The second of the two charges, that the notion ought not to be mentalistic, is easily dispensed with, for the sort of non-mentalistic notion that is usually offered is something Beardsley and Wimsatt themselves explicitly set aside. They quote "an eminent intentionalist" as arguing that "the poet's aim must be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself" (qtd. 469). This is a way to say that intention is really part of the work, an internal design or structure. But Beardsley and Wimsatt are clear that they are not interested to argue about such a notion.<sup>4</sup>

One may, of course, object to Beardsley and Wimsatt's definition on independent grounds. This would be a certain philosophical challenge. But it is not open to the objector to dispute the definition *qua* stipulation, as if Beardsley and Wimsatt are uncertain about what they mean to be talking about. The best one can do is to reject, as not worth one's time, a debate predicated on a notion so defined (as opposed to defined in one's preferred way). This would amount to a refusal to participate in the debate.

But such an attitude would be premature. There is, in fact, something very interesting about Beardsley and Wimsatt's definition, rarely brought up in such

4. Ellis (1974) is even clearer: "To talk of the 'intent' of the poem, if this is an abstraction from the text which is justified by reference to the text, raises none of the problems of the intentional fallacy—except terminological confusion, for which reason the term is best avoided in this context" (109).

discussions. This is that they broach their definition not with the oft-quoted phrase “plan or design in the author’s mind,” but with the following statement:

“Intention,” as we shall use the term, corresponds to *what he intended* in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. “In order to judge the poet’s performance, we must know *what he intended*.” Intention is plan or design in the author’s mind. (468–469)

Notice the metalinguistic framing. The subject of interest appears to be, not the phenomenon of intention, but a certain “formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance.” Beardsley and Wimsatt’s (somewhat casual) analysis of the thing to which the relevant term in this formula may be taken to refer is, indeed, “plan or design in the author’s mind,” but this is not of much consequence to their argument. For they are interested in how critics use a particular kind of language—what I will hereafter call *intention-talk*—not, at least not directly, in the thing in the world to which this language refers.

This also obviates the first of the two charges mentioned above, that “plan or design in the author’s mind” is too simplistic an account of intention, for even if we come up with a better account it could not overturn Beardsley and Wimsatt’s definition, given that their definition is not, in the first instance, “plan or design in the author’s mind,” but whatever referent is presupposed by intention-talk. I hesitate, in fact, to call this a definition of “intention” at all—though it is easy to construe it as one, namely as a functional definition. It seems instead only to be an expression of their interest in the status and validity of intention-talk, to properly satisfy which interest they need, of course, to say some things about intention, but only *some* things. This is one of the many ways in which their focus on intentions has been misleading.

Before taking up the intentional fallacy proper, I consider some of Beardsley and Wimsatt’s claims in relation to the themes that I have been discussing. For not all of their claims, despite their frequent suggestions to the contrary, are made in relation to what they properly call the intentional fallacy. Consider their claim that

Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we

infer the intention of an artificer. “A poem should not mean but be.” A poem can only *be* through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. (469)

We are told that there is “no excuse for inquiring what part is intended,” but it is not clear in what context such requests are to be made. Who is asking, for what, and when? If we trace the continuities I wish to trace, we see this passage as fudging the distinction between experience and criticism. To experience a poem, properly at any rate, is for it to *work* (in relation to one). A poem that does not work is one that cannot properly be experienced. The inquirer, meanwhile, is a critic who is interpreting the poem, who is sought out (or assumed as a role) by readers of poems when questions arise about a poem’s working or not working. So while it may be true that one is *unlikely* to inquire after intentions when a poem works, these are separate things that ought to be distinguished.

Lewis did not distinguish them, nor do Beardsley and Wimsatt. Yet, to the extent that Beardsley and Wimsatt are inheriting concerns from an existing debate over biographical information, they nevertheless manage to frame their discussion in the old way, concerning the use of biographical information. Only, they now demand of biographical inquirers that they be satisfied with a poem simply working, even though such inquirers, at least in the old style (as witnessed in the views canvassed by Teeter and Cherniss), reject that poems can suitably work on a reader in the absence of the reader’s imaginatively entering certain circumstances, those either of the poet or of the poet’s contemporary audience.

While Beardsley and Wimsatt do grant that “[t]he meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul,” they minimize the relevance of this by adding that “[w]e ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker*, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference” (470). Recall Lewis’s claim that what we learn of the poet is an “unpoetical result,” not part of the “poetical experience.” To this extent, Beardsley and Wimsatt share Lewis’s perspective on the experience of art. But, in certain other remarks, they

go beyond Lewis's edicts. These remarks principally concern criticism.

They consider Croce's view that "*Historical interpretation labours ... to reintegrate in us the psychological conditions which have changed in the course of history. It ... enables us to see a work of art (a physical object) as its author saw it in the moment of production*" (qtd. 472). Like many of Teeter's and Cherniss's examples, this is explicitly about interpretation as a discursive practice—what it "labours" to do, namely "enables us to see" (the "us" being readers of criticism)—and thus is difficult to dismiss *simply* on the grounds of its having misconstrued experience (for it is manifestly not about experience but the role of criticism in *facilitating* experience). Here Beardsley and Wimsatt make an original contribution, or at least lay the groundwork for one. They say that "Croce's system," despite having "an ambiguous emphasis on history," could inspire a critic to "write a close analysis ... that involves close historical study but remains aesthetic criticism." Notice the shift from poems simply working to the desiderata for "aesthetic criticism." Such comments are metacritical, in that they concern the norms of critical discourse.

I find that there are two components to what Beardsley and Wimsatt argue in their article. One is an account of "aesthetic criticism," the other what I take to be an error theory. The error described in the latter is what properly goes by the name of the fallacy, but the former often gets the lion's share of the attention (leading many commentators to wonder what is supposed to be fallacious about disagreeing with a certain account of criticism). The two components are logically distinct but related in Beardsley and Wimsatt's argument. The account of aesthetic criticism throws a lot of criticism into likely error, for the explanation of which an error theory is offered. The error theory is about a putative error made by *critics*, not by *metacritics* (theorists of criticism) or by consumers of works. Beardsley and Wimsatt thus envision the following three-level hierarchy: *consumers* of works read *criticism* the norms of which are argued over by *metacritics*. I will discuss this hierarchy in more detail in the final section of this chapter, in which I examine Beardsley's (self-described) metacritical conception of the philosophy of art. In the remainder of this section I describe the two components I have just identified.

Take first the account of aesthetic criticism. It is best seen in how Beardsley

and Wimsatt handle certain examples, rather than in any of their programmatic remarks (of which there are surprisingly few). Unfortunately, the examples in which they best demonstrate their account are complicated by the thorny phenomenon of allusion. One such is their final example, in which they canvass the possibility that Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" alludes to Donne. They describe "two radically different ways of looking for an answer": "the way of poetic analysis and exegesis, which inquires whether it makes any sense if Eliot-Prufrock *is* thinking about Donne," and "the way of biographical or genetic inquiry, in which, taking advantage of the fact that Eliot is still alive, and in the spirit of a man who would settle a bet, the critic writes to Eliot and asks what he meant, or if he had Donne in mind" (486-487).

Note that the question of interest is about "ways of looking," not (at least not directly) about what is true of the work (or what the work means). The example is good because it brings out what is supposed to be in opposition, but the precise formulations given to these ways of looking is less informative than one would like. For instance, in practising "poetic analysis" the critic is said to determine whether there is any "resemblance" which is "better ... thought of" than not. But, even setting aside that it is unclear what it takes for something to be better thought of than not, many theorists deny that allusion is simply a matter of resemblance (Hermerén 1992).

Moreover, the way of "biographical or genetic inquiry" is (one might think) unfairly characterized as that of "consulting the oracle," when in fact nobody really advocates this (at least not in their sober, theoretical moments). As we saw in the pre-Beardsley and Wimsatt literature, and will go on to see in the post-Beardsley and Wimsatt literature, advocates of biographical information are interested less in what an artist has presently to say (if they are interested in what he has to say at all) than in what he thought and did while creating the work.

Nonetheless, something general we can extrapolate from Beardsley and Wimsatt's remarks is an emphasis on the work itself, what Cherniss calls the "independent existence" of the work. I think it is best to read such of their remarks, at least in this context, not as ontological proposals but as metacritical proposals, namely about how critics should approach works, rather than about



a work's having such-and-such fundamental nature. Critics should approach works as objects of independent interest rather than as merely the residue of, or conduit for, something that commands greater interest. Thus Beardsley and Wimsatt say that "there is a danger of confusing personal and poetic studies; and there is a fault of writing the personal as if it were the poetic" (1946, 477). If critics treat poems as, say, vehicles for the poet's personality, where the latter is their true interest (deriving the personality from the poem), then they are not treating the poem with the independent interest that is requisite for their endeavour to count as a poetic study.

One of the ways we are said to be able to tell which sort of study is being conducted is to look at the nature of the evidence adduced by the critic:

There is a difference between internal and external evidence for the meaning of a poem. And the paradox is only verbal and superficial that what is (1) internal is also public: it is discovered through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture; while what is (2) external is private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact: it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem—to what lady, while sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother. There is (3) an intermediate kind of evidence about the character of the author or about private or semi-private meanings attached to words or topics by an author or by a coterie of which he is a member. The meaning of words is the history of words, and the biography of an author, his use of a word, and the associations which the word had for *him*, are part of the word's history and meaning. (477-478)

It is often supposed that Beardsley and Wimsatt prohibit external evidence while permitting only internal evidence—also that the mere existence of the third category is some sort of inexplicable blunder that throws the entire account

into confusion and incoherence. But none of this seems to me true. The way Beardsley and Wimsatt make use of this tripartite account is actually quite subtle. They do not say that any one type is prohibited, or that any other is the only one permitted. In fact, they do not speak in such terms at all.

They instead make more general statements about the type of criticism that is produced according to the proportion in which the critic makes use of the different types of evidence. In particular, they say that “a critic who is concerned with evidence of type (1) and moderately with that of type (3) will in the long run produce a different sort of comment from that of the critic who is concerned with type (2) and with (3) where it shades into (2)” (478). This may be viewed as corresponding to the distinction between the way of poetic analysis and the way of biographical information, respectively.

The latter correspondence better explains Beardsley and Wimsatt’s account of evidence than do their own explicit definitions of internal and external. The point about poetic vs. personal study is one of directionality: at what is the critic directed, the poem in front of her or the personality of the poet? If the poem, then the critic will tend to use certain types of evidence, namely those which bear on features of the poem (internal). If the personality, then the critic will tend to use certain *other* types of evidence, namely those which bear on the features of the *personality* (external). I believe this is much of what Beardsley and Wimsatt are trying to say, an ambition clouded by the intrusion of notions such as “public” and “private” which have gotten only more convoluted in the philosophical literature over the decades.

So much for Beardsley and Wimsatt’s account of aesthetic criticism, at least for now. I turn next to what I am calling their error theory (what is normally called their account of the intentional fallacy). Both fallacies and errors are kinds of mistake, though probably not the same kind of mistake. I find the terminology of fallacy less helpful, certainly in the case of informal fallacies (which is the only kind Beardsley and Wimsatt’s could be, given that it does not concern purely logical terms). Fallacies, moreover, are held to involve some process of reasoning gone awry, and it is not clear to me that the alleged mistake of those who are said to fall victim to the intentional fallacy is a mistake

of reasoning.<sup>5</sup> The label of “fallacy” might well have been chosen because it is catchy (like Lewis’s “personal heresy,” which I imagine he did not literally take to be a heresy), rather than for any sound logical reasons. But it ultimately matters little if we persist in calling the relevant error a fallacy. What is more important is the role the accusation of fallacy is taken to play in Beardsley and Wimsatt’s argument. It seems to me to play an error-theoretic role.

As Richard Joyce explains with respect to *moral* error theory, which we may use as an example, “the object of an error theoretic stance is a *discourse*: We are error theorists about phlogiston discourse, not about phlogiston” (2015). However,

[j]ust as we obviously don’t think that *every* sentence containing the word “phlogiston” is untrue (consider “Phlogiston doesn’t exist” and “17th-century chemists believed in phlogiston”), nor does the moral error theorist hold that *every* sentence containing a moral term is untrue.... Rather, the error theorist focuses on a proper subset of sentences containing the problematic terms: those that imply or presuppose the instantiation of a moral property.

I think this is a useful model, though it requires careful application. First, we are concerned with *critical* discourse, and that, too, of a certain kind, what I above called intention-talk. Second, we are concerned not with the *truth* of intention-talk but with its *relevance* (in and as criticism). Third, in accordance with this model, not *all* uses of intention-talk are held to be objectionable, only a “proper subset of sentences.” How should this subset be defined? Let us provisionally say that the objectionable kind of intention-talk, for Beardsley and Wimsatt, is that which is used to “writ[e] the personal as if it were the poetic.” As we will see in the next section, in Beardsley’s elaboration on this point, there is indeed an analogy to terms that “imply or presuppose the instantiation of a moral property,” namely those which imply or presuppose the instantiation of an *intentional* property.

5. In a subsequent article (1949), Beardsley and Wimsatt describe the intentional fallacy as “a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy,” “a confusion between the poem and its origins” (31). I do not go against this understanding, but give it less importance in my assessment of what Beardsley and Wimsatt are doing.

To be clear, the alleged problem is not that intention-talk is about intentions, but that it is (in a range of cases) erroneously taken to be about the work. This might sound absurd. Surely critics know what they are talking about: producing poor criticism is one thing, not knowing whether one is producing criticism at all is another. Here we must look to (what I take to be) Beardsley and Wimsatt's specific error theory, which is well-represented in one of their initial propositions:

A poem does not come into existence by accident. The words of a poem ... come out of a head, not out of a hat. Yet to insist on the designing intellect as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a *standard*. (1946, 469)

The "standards" are, presumably, the criteria or truth-conditions for interpretations. (Beardsley and Wimsatt do not say anything very precise about this.) Critics who heavily invest in external evidence, drawing on diaries and other unearthed documents from and about the artist, are said to be lulled into making a mistake about such standards. They quite naturally appreciate the *causal* relevance of the artist and his intentions—for how else did the work get to be the way it is?—but mistake this for an *aesthetic* relevance, a substitute for "close analysis" of the work. This is meant to explain how so many critics could be so mistaken, how they could (erroneously) be "writing the personal as if it were the poetic."

One may object that it is unfair to saddle a large group of critics with such a confusion. This may be to contest the account of aesthetic criticism rather than the error theory, for the error theory takes the fact of error for granted and attempts only to explain how it could come about (given that it does). Adjudicating this complex issue as a whole requires looking at the data of critical practice and analyzing how intention-talk is conducted, e.g. how biographical information is used. Do the offending critics rely on such information *only* because the facts which this information concerns are believed to be causal contributors to the features of the work? And does such a reliance betray a sense that it is *substituting* for "close analysis"? How many critics are guilty of such a thing anyway, even if some are? What about others? What

should we say of critics who use biographical information in other ways? While I don't quite engage the empirical side of such questions, I do, in what follows, attempt to clarify the nature of the opposition that gives rise to them.

### 1.1.3 *Post-Beardsley and Wimsatt*

Almost everyone writing on the issues I have so far discussed has felt it incumbent to mention the "intentional fallacy," if not to actually take up Beardsley and Wimsatt's article. Some of this influence has been salutary, some regrettable. I am, as I have intimated, skeptical of the fruitfulness of according such importance to the notion of intention. The choice is strategic for Beardsley and Wimsatt, in that their error theory relies on there being a confusion between cause and standard, and the best candidate for an artist's causal contribution to a work, one from which an interpretation could be derived, is indeed an intention. But this alone does not make the notion integral to the issues which Beardsley and Wimsatt inherited.

In a recent essay, Stein Haugom Olsen (2010) criticizes Beardsley and Wimsatt for "reconceptualiz[ing] the problem of the relevance of historical and biographical information in criticism as a problem about authorial intention" (441). I share his concern, but part with him when he suggests that Beardsley and Wimsatt attempt to "legislate against all use of biographical information." For there is still considerable ambiguity about the sense of "use" that is at issue. We can see this to some extent in what I have already said, for it is only that use of biographical information through which the critic writes "the personal as if it were the poetic" that is held to be objectionable. Many of Beardsley and Wimsatt's contemporary opponents similarly overlook this aspect of the objection.

A prominent literary critic, Leslie Fiedler, takes up the cause of the opposition in 1952. He concedes that "[i]nsofar as this [anti-intentionalist] position rests upon the immortal platitude that it is good to know what one is talking about, it is unexceptionable" (1952, 253). But in objecting to Beardsley and Wimsatt, he focuses, like many others, on their assertion that "[a] poem should not mean but be." Fiedler understands this to mean that "a work of art is, or

should be, absolutely self-contained, a discrete set of mutually inter-related references ... a closed system, 'cut-off' in ideal isolation" (254). This is a common ontological reading of Beardsley and Wimsatt, about the nature of the work. Yet, as I have argued, what they are really trying to advance is a *metacritical* thesis, about how the work should be approached by critics. It is unfortunate that, in assertions such as the one quoted by Fiedler, Beardsley and Wimsatt conflate the subject of experience and that of criticism (in the manner that I suggest above), which often accounts for their being read along ontological lines.

Fiedler is not, however, insensitive to the relevant metacritical implications. He sums them up in "the *leit-motif* of the New Teacher: 'Stay *inside* the poem!'" Beardsley and Wimsatt do say such things, and to back them up offer the suggestive term "internal evidence." But if one looks at what internal evidence is supposed to be (the long quote above), one notices that it includes all manner of things that clearly do not belong "inside" a work: "our habitual knowledge of the language," "grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general ... all that makes a language and culture." So the standard sort of objection about the necessity of contextual information, about the impossibility of blinding oneself to everything other than the work, does not quite apply.

Through much of his essay Fiedler is concerned to establish that "[t]he poet's life is the focusing glass through which pass the determinants of the shape of his work" (260). This may be true, but we still need some account of why the "glass" itself, in addition to what it projects, is relevant to criticism.<sup>6</sup> Fiedler seems largely to assume this, but at times betrays an uneasiness with the assumption, as when he attributes the popularity of the "antibiographist tendency" to "the failure of its opponents to arrive at any *coherent* theory of the relationship between the life of the poet and his work," the willingness of "biographers ... merely to place side by side undigested biographical data and uninspired paraphrases of poems" (258). But in his own attempt to describe the

6. As Ellis (1974) puts it, one might grant that works are "determined by the poet's problems" but maintain that "it is irrelevant to their status as literature that they are so determined" (129-130).

fundamentals of this relationship, what sort of thing it should even be taken to be, he seems to founder, to go against what he himself earlier conceded to be “unexceptionable” (viz. that “it is good to know what one is talking about”). He complains, namely, that “in a world of discrete, individual ‘experiences,’ of ‘close-reading’ ... one cannot even talk of so large an abstraction as poetry,” for according to the antibiographer “[i]t is only ‘poems’ to which the student must be exposed” (259). Fiedler calls this “our atomized period,” in which “the ordinary student cannot or will not connect the few facts he knows, the slim insights he has previously attained, the chance extensions of sensibility into which he has been once or twice tempted, into a large enough context to make sense of the world he inhabits, or the works of art he encounters.”

This is, to be sure, an engaging line of thought, one that has been independently advanced by, among others, Richard Wollheim, who similarly complains about “an unduly atomistic conception of criticism”:

Certainly, in seeking to understand a particular work of art, we try to grasp it in its particularity, and so we concentrate on it as hard as we can: but at the same time we are trying to build up an overall picture of art, and so we relate the work to other works and to art itself. (1980b, 198–199)

Beardsley and Wimsatt would likely respond by observing that this is simply to talk about a different kind of discourse, a larger one that perhaps includes several others. What they call criticism is criticism of individual works, certain alleged norms of which are what are in dispute in the intentionalism debate. One way in which a critic may stray from such criticism (of individual works) is to wander into a study of personality, the temptation to do which, and one’s lack of awareness about doing which, are what Beardsley and Wimsatt hope to explain with their error theory (as described above). What other things a critic does in her writing, even within the same piece of writing, are beside the point. Nor is she barred from bringing to bear on this more work-oriented criticism the fruits of her wider-ranging disquisitions (namely, by their being admitted as internal evidence). To an extent I agree with this style of response, and I will periodically return to such questions concerning the scope of criticism *qua*

criticism.

Let me continue by mentioning a scholar, Victor Erlich, who responds to Fiedler in terms very different from the above. Erlich is representative of the many commentators who wish perhaps too hastily to have a resolved attitude toward Beardsley and Wimsatt. Although he is receptive to Fiedler's opinion that "inveighing against biography" is "a case of flogging a dead horse," he wonders "whether the horse is not merely playing dead" (1954, 130). He reiterates Beardsley and Wimsatt's point that a certain kind of criticism "speaks *about* a poem" while another speaks "*around* the poem" (1954, 131). The former Beardsley and Wimsatt call aesthetic criticism, the latter (or one type of the latter) biographical criticism. But Erlich also comes down on Beardsley and Wimsatt for their having "disregard[ed], for the sake of methodological purity, 'extrinsic' evidence which could actually help illuminate the work"; this is to "inhibit critical analysis, to narrow down arbitrarily the range of literary scholarship."

It is obvious, however, that if some piece of evidence *were* to "illuminate the work," Beardsley and Wimsatt would have nothing to say against it. So much Erlich himself concedes shortly after making his pronouncement: "However, I cannot think of any reputable exponent of 'intrinsic' criticism who would quarrel with this obvious truth." It is another matter that Beardsley and Wimsatt have little to say about the permissibility of *individual* pieces of evidence; they largely restrict their advice to habits of evidence-cultivation.

Such vacillation as Erlich displays is often a symptom of the theorist's having all the pieces but neglecting to put them together. Erlich notes that while "[n]o amount of information of John Milton's property will help elucidate a single line in *Paradise Lost*"—perhaps an overstatement—"it would be spurious to deny the causal nexus between Dostoevsky's attitude toward his father and the theme of parricide in *The Brothers Karamazov*" (131). But Beardsley and Wimsatt do not deny putative causal facts such as the latter. If anything, they highlight them! According to Beardsley and Wimsatt it is precisely a recognition of such facts that impels critics to make of them more than they are. The intentionalist's task, Beardsley and Wimsatt believe, is not merely to advocate a *recognition* of such causal facts but to argue for their critical *relevance*. For instance, on what basis



are critics attributing the theme of parricide to Dostoevsky's work? If on the basis of certain other, "internal" evidence, then the biographical information would seem to be explanatorily inert.

In 1955, Henry Aiken contributes to the debate in an essay whose chief virtue is its admirable clear-headedness about the distinction between experience and criticism. The position Aiken eventually reaches is, I think, the sort of position C. S. Lewis would likely have adopted had he as clearly made the mentioned distinction. Aiken observes that the term "interpretation" is sometimes "used in a way which seems to refer to the primary activities of reading, listening, and contemplating" (1955, 747). This he regards "as a misuse of the expression," which "[m]ore properly ... is employed to refer to the activities of a critic in paraphrasing, describing, explaining, explicating, analysing, and the like."<sup>7</sup> In its proper sense, interpretation is "an ancillary activity, undertaken in order to accomplish something beyond itself," to "guide, direct, and in general to improve the facility with which primary acts which are proper to works of art are performed." Interpretations are "properly judged on this basis," on how well they enable us to perform such "primary acts."

Even though, continues Aiken, in the moment of experiencing a work "the farthest thing from my mind is what [the artist] may have intended to say,"

with most complex works of art repeated study ... is necessary in order to place oneself in a position to perform successfully the primary acts required for the appreciation of the work. In short, most works of art have to be interpreted, and it is because of this that the consideration of what an artist intended to say or do in a work becomes relevant, although indirectly, to appreciation and to appraisal. (752)

The key word is "indirectly," for Aiken's claim is not that one mentions what the artist intended *because* the artist intended it; rather it is because what the

7. Such sentiments are common among artists and critics alike. See, e.g., the book on craft by novelist and publisher William Sloane (1979): "A true act of reading is quite possibly the reverse of scanning words professionally, as practiced by the critic. The critic is analyzing and diagnosing and studying, and he is all the while carrying on a complicated process, which, at the risk of oversimplification, I shall describe as reading for the writer and writing for the reader" (79).

artist intended happens to be a good thing for a consumer of the work to experience. Here a reference to the intention is, we might think, superfluous in the piece of criticism, even if without having known of the intention the critic would not have hit on just the meaning he did.

T. M. Gang (1957) expresses a version of this idea when he says that if an “intention is reconstructed entirely from the data [of the work] which would in themselves serve equally well to limit the meaning, there will be no point in constructing it, and some danger that we may give the construct more authority than it deserves” (182). This is supposed to be in contrast to recovering an intention from “external data, such as note-books, prefaces, or letters,” which Gang claims could make the intention “worth invoking.” But it seems to me that in either case legitimate doubts arise about the “point” of mentioning the intention, regardless of how the critic has arrived at the given meaning. The distinction between a context of discovery and a context of justification comes to mind: a critic’s having discovered the right meaning by consulting what the artist intended is not *ipso facto* justification of any subsequent attribution of that meaning to the work. Attributions of meaning are perhaps to be justified in other ways, for instance, as in Aiken, in terms of how one would experience the work under the given conception (which one might think is independent of whether the artist in fact intended this conception), or, as Gang puts it, by the “data” of the work “which in themselves serve equally well.”

This is a crucial point which seems to have been ignored by many of Beardsley and Wimsatt’s contemporary opponents. Some acknowledge the point but dismiss it as not really what is at issue, as something more nuanced and sophisticated than what Beardsley and Wimsatt could have been insisting on. (An example of the latter is Joseph Margolis, discussed below.) This would not be an entirely unfair accusation, since Beardsley and Wimsatt are not very clear. But I believe that their claims about cause and standard, about what I am calling their error theory, bear out this more complicated point. That intentions have a causal role in producing the work’s features perhaps makes them suitable to consult to discover what the work means, simply due to probability and sometimes due to ease, but it does not, Beardsley and Wimsatt believe, justify the resulting attributions of meaning.

In 1958, in his opus, *Aesthetics*, Beardsley makes a noteworthy contribution. Some of what he says, however, is merely a reiteration and slight clarification of earlier points, to wit,

we can draw a pretty clear distinction between two types of critic, in any of the arts. There are those critics who talk steadily and helpfully about the aesthetic object itself, and who test their statements about it by what can be found within it. They may take advantage of external evidence, where it is available, to suggest hypotheses about what may be in the work.... But the proof, the confirmation, of the hypothesis is the poem itself.... There are other critics who tend to shift back and forth between the work and its creator, never quite clear in their own minds when they are talking about the one or the other. They mingle the evidences of intention with the evidences of accomplishment, and sometimes decide what the work is or means primarily on external evidence. This is to practice intentionalistic criticism. (1958, 26–27)

Let me note a few things about what is said in this passage. First, the idea is reiterated that use of evidence is assessed in terms of what sort of criticism it leads to, rather than in terms of what is permissible in some individual case. External evidence is not unthinkingly or reactively outlawed, as if by fiat, but is rather taken as an indication, when it is heavily relied on, of the kind of discourse being engaged in. Moreover, such evidence is deemed salutary when it is used in a certain way, namely to “suggest hypotheses” the “proof” (or justification) of which is found in “the poem itself.”

Noticing such things helps dispel certain unfair assessments of what Beardsley and Wimsatt are up to, at the same time as it brings into clearer focus how Beardsley and Wimsatt themselves are perhaps being unfair to their opponents. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, intentionalists may defend the use of “external” evidence on quite other grounds than those which Beardsley seems to regard as the only possible ones, viz. to suggest hypotheses that must be tested against the work. For the moment, let us proceed by looking at how Beardsley attempts to clarify his case for these being the only possible grounds.

The exhortation to a critic is to be clear about her subject. Critics who are said to be unclear, to write “the personal as if it were the poetic,” practice criticism (in particular, use intention-talk) in a certain way. So do critics who are said to be clear (they use intention-talk in a certain *other* way). How should we characterize these ways, i.e. more precisely than in the vague terms of internal evidence and external evidence (with which many of Beardsley and Wimsatt’s opponents have rightly been dissatisfied)? To accuse a critic of writing the personal as if it were the poetic is, it seems to me, to accuse her of taking the artist, rather than the work, as her subject. We may thus regard Beardsley as offering, in what I am about to describe, an analysis of what it means to take the artist, rather than the work, as one’s subject.

Beardsley differentiates two kinds of intention-talk, the “harmless” and the objectionable. He mentions, as an example of the former, Cleanth Brooks’s assertion regarding some lines of Wordsworth’s that “The metrical situation of the stanza, by the way, would seem to support the view that the strained effect is ‘*intentional*,’” and his subsequent clarification in a footnote that “Whatever Wordsworth’s intention, the sense of the strain fits perfectly the effect which the poem as a whole demands” (qtd. 27). Here Gang would say, as I quote above, that the “intention is reconstructed entirely from data which would in themselves serve equally well to limit the meaning,” and that Brooks’s footnote is meant to allay the suspicion that the hypothesized intention is being given “more authority than it deserves.”

We could, moreover, convert this case into another type of “harmless” one. Suppose Brooks’s belief about Wordsworth’s intention was derived not from the data of the poem—the “metrical situation of the stanza”—but from some “external” source such as a diary or notebook. According to Beardsley, such cases count as responsible criticism only if the critic then justifies the newly-constructed “hypothesis” by appealing, once again, to the data of the poem (e.g. to the “metrical situation of the stanza”). For the aim, ultimately, is to talk about the poem. That Wordsworth had such-and-such intentions is a claim about the poet. The critic who wishes to bring in such claims must find a way to relate them to claims about the meaning of the poem. The norms governing how this may be done, as a general matter, are a subject for the metacritic. Under

Beardsley's metacriticism, the only responsible way for a critic to relate external evidence to the work is to independently (i.e. through "close analysis") make sense of the work as meaning the intended thing, regardless of the intended thing's being intended.

So much for the harmless variety of intention-talk. Beardsley offers the following statement as a possible example of the objectionable variety: "In this work there is an unsuccessful effort to particularize the characters" (28). The alleged problem, at least in the context in which Beardsley seems to be imagining such a statement, is that we do not know "how much of the [statement] refers to the work and how much to the artist." If the statement is principally about the artist, so that we take it to mean that the artist "wanted to particularize his characters very much but was unable to," then it holds no direct interest for criticism. Its only possible interest lies in our reading it as really being about the work in some oblique way, something the critic "finds in the [work] that he is tempted to describe in this fashion." We then need to be told what the critic "thinks would *test* his statement" and thereby to dig out "its *nonintentionalistic* meaning" ("what it actually says about the [work] itself").

Beardsley characterizes the harmless variety of intention-talk as "merely verbal" and the objectionable variety, when not resolvable in the manner described, as "inexpugnably intentionalistic." This distinction is elucidated in terms of translatability: "even if part of the meaning of such [inexpugnably intentionalistic] terms can be translated into a direct description or interpretation of the work itself, there is a residue that cannot" (28). Harmless intention-talk, by contrast, is said to consist only of "misleading ways of talking about the work itself," and hence to be entirely so translatable (without "residue").

How, one may be wondering, is any of this relevant to Beardsley and Wimsatt's larger view? The first thing to note is that Beardsley's objection to inexpugnably intentionalistic terms is part of his defence of a certain ideal of criticism, what Beardsley and Wimsatt earlier called "aesthetic criticism." The claim is that criticism of individual works, as opposed to the less "atomistic" criticism championed by the likes of Fiedler and Wollheim, is a particular sort of thing, susceptible to a particular sort of logical definition. It is a kind of discourse concerned with the work, such that every sentence properly so classified is

a sentence about the work. The latter is a logical notion to the extent that the surface grammar of the relevant sentences might not easily reflect it. One might need sometimes to “translate” such sentences to get a clearer sense of their import. When no such translation is possible and the surface grammar is actually a good indication that the sentence is *not* about the work, then that sentence is not properly classifiable as a *critical statement*. Beardsley defines a critical statement, with apparently deliberate vagueness, as “any statement about a work of art” (3).

Now, it might be that no actual piece of writing is what we may call “pure” criticism, in this logical sense. Actual pieces of writing do lots of things besides make critical statements, if only to be coherent and readable by actual people (rather than only by critical-statement-processing machines). But what Beardsley and Wimsatt are proposing, it seems to me, is a way to regiment the language of criticism to better reflect its aims and purposes. If a critic claims to be offering a piece of writing that will largely be about a certain work but it turns out to be filled mostly with sentences that are not really about that work, then something has gone wrong. A sociological point that Beardsley and Wimsatt make, which inspires them to push their analysis, is that too much criticism is of this sort, filled with disguised claims about the artist.

Their error theory is meant to explain how it could be that so many critics make the mistake of (in Beardsley’s new terminology) using inexpugnably intentionalistic terms in an attempt to characterize the work. This is said to happen when critics make more than they should of the fact that the poem came “out of a head, not out of a hat.” In such moments, critics allow this causal fact to double as a standard of interpretation. If a critic thinks this way then he will indeed take himself to be talking about the work when he reports what the artist intended, for the intention’s presumed causal efficacy is misconstrued as aesthetic relevance. So influenced, a critic will say that the artist intended some meaning as a way of saying that the *work* means that thing. This is what Beardsley and Wimsatt’s account of aesthetic criticism identifies as a mistake, as not really a critical statement.

Although this contribution of Beardsley’s did not make any waves in the ensuing commentary, some writers did seem tacitly to pick up on it (or simply

to follow similar lines of thought). For instance, John Kemp (1964) notices that questions like, “Why did the painter paint a line of this particular shape and colour in this particular place?,” tend to be given answers that “almost invariably [are] answers to a quite different kind of question, viz. ‘What does this line contribute to the painting?’” (151). If the former sort of question may indeed be satisfied by answers to the latter sort, then it would seem to refer to the artist only in what Beardsley would call a “merely verbal” way (not “inexpugnably”).<sup>8</sup> Kemp also acknowledges that “[w]e may sometimes find it useful to know what an artist intended to do, to the extent that . . . a knowledge of his intentions may lead us to see things about the work of art that we might not have otherwise noticed.” This, Beardsley would say, is a case of using external evidence merely to suggest hypotheses that are independently confirmed by the “data” of the work.

Joseph Margolis, writing in 1965, sees the dialectic clearly but does not hold the two sides properly accountable. His own view is as follows:

Even if we should have clear evidence of the artist’s intention, in the sense, say, of an *independent* document, we should assess the plausibility of the interpretation it itself pointed to by appeal to critical canons not bound to that intention, hence, the criterion of the artist’s intention can be supplementary at best. Furthermore, even if the interpretation based on the artist’s intent were admitted as an eligible one, we would be willing to evaluate it against alternative and equally plausible interpretations, without regard to its special source. (1965, 97)

One might think that holding such a view is tantamount to coming down against intentionalism and siding with Beardsley and Wimsatt. But Margolis claims, somewhat strangely, that “no one would wish to deny” his view, that,

8. See also Lycan and Machamer (1973), in which the authors propose a notion of “detachable reasons” that is not unlike Beardsley’s notion of “merely verbal” intentionalistic language. In one of their initial characterizations of their notion, they propose “that ‘—was painted while the artist was in Rome’ could be replaced by ‘—was influenced by Michelangelo in *this* way’ (or better, ‘—looks *this* way’) without loss of critical efficacy” (100). They express this “by saying that the artist’s presence in Rome is a ‘detachable’ fact.”

to the extent that an intention is treated “like any clue, however unusual or unexpected its source ... Wimsatt and Beardsley are in agreement with their would-be opponents” (101).<sup>9</sup>

Margolis is not wrong in noticing that such eventual agreement is often reached, but he *is* wrong in his conception of what *ought* to be the disagreement between the two sides, for it is precisely as a “special source” that intentions are championed by intentionalists, at least in their rhetoric. Margolis’s relaxed attitude is shared by many contributors to the debate, most of whom are casual observers of a passing scene and chip in only to register indignation at having so obviously useful a thing as biographical information be summarily outlawed. Or, in the manner of Empson (in my epigraph to this chapter), they are more interested in the cultural effects downstream than in any nuanced debate between the “high priests.”

One such high priest is Hirsch, who effects, in 1967, what I regard as a revolution of sorts in the debate, one which is as much to his advantage as Beardsley and Wimsatt’s shift to intentions was to theirs. In particular, Hirsch replaces the status quo of a *criticism-first* approach with a new paradigm of a *meaning-first* approach. Beardsley and Wimsatt, and virtually all of their contemporaries, begin with the question: what ought a critic do? Hirsch begins with the question: what is a work’s meaning? One can see this quite clearly in the way Hirsch chooses to frame the debate. He identifies intentionalism as “the sensible belief that a text means what its author meant,” and associates anti-intentionalism with the thesis of “semantic autonomy,” which holds that literature is “detach[ed]” from “the subjective realm of the author’s personal thoughts and feelings” due to the fact that “all written language remains independent of that subjective realm” (1967, 1).

Hirsch’s central claim is that “meaning is an affair of consciousness, not

9. In a substantially revised version of the chapter from which I have quoted, Margolis changes the above claim that intentions are “supplementary at best” to the claim that they are so supplementary only “*in this [one] sense*” (1980, 167). He goes on to suggest, presumably with respect to another sense, that “‘extra-textual’ materials ... may ... inform us of what we judge to be ‘in’ the work—in a way that could not be exclusively and otherwise discerned” (169). I mention this not only to be fair to Margolis, but also to highlight that he himself evidently came to be dissatisfied with his initial treatment of the issue.



of words,” for “[a]lmost any word sequence can, under the conventions of language, legitimately represent more than one complex of meaning” (4). This is Hirsch’s line of attack not only against semantic autonomy—which fails to appreciate that meaning is an affair of consciousness—but also against Beardsley and Wimsatt in particular, whose proposed method of aesthetic criticism is alleged to be unable to deliver “objectively valid interpretation.” Although Hirsch so takes a meaning-first approach, he is conscious of entering a decades-long debate that is primarily about criticism. What he tries to do is to derive the relevant metacritical principles *from* his analysis of meaning. However, as I will show in the next chapter, those who followed in his wake increasingly neglected this latter part of the project. The analysis of meaning came to consume the entire discussion.

Late in his book, Hirsch acknowledges that “[t]he analyses and arguments of the preceding chapters have paid scant attention to the practical exigencies of textual commentary” (127). Much of Hirsch’s book is indeed about what he calls “verbal meaning,” what it is and how it is determined (not by critics but *in the world*, so to speak). In arguing for his view, Hirsch distinguishes between meaning and significance:

*Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. (8)

A work’s meaning is supposed to be invariant, always there as the self-same thing for all people to experience and understand. A work’s significance, by contrast, may be particular to individual readers, depending on how it is related to the work’s meaning. This distinction allows Hirsch to explain away certain competing accounts of meaning as really concerned with significance. He believes that a “[f]ailure to consider this simple and essential distinction has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory.”

More to my purpose here, meaning and significance have “corollaries” which pertain “to the practice of criticism” (136). These are interpretation and criticism,

respectively. Hirsch reserves the label “interpretation” for an “*explanation* of meaning”—as opposed to an “understanding” of meaning (which we may view as among Aiken’s “primary activities”)—that is concerned exclusively (“atomistically”) with the individual work. He acknowledges, however, that “most commentaries that we [more loosely] call interpretations are concerned with significance as well as meaning. They draw analogies and point out relationships which not only help us to understand meaning but also lead us to perceive values and relevancies” (136). To these Hirsch gives the label “criticism,” thus providing something of an answer to the earlier complaints about holding too “atomistic” a conception of criticism.

Terminology aside, there is not much in the foregoing passage with which Beardsley and Wimsatt would disagree. There is, however, a significant difference in explanatory priorities. For Hirsch there are

no correct ‘methods’ of interpretation, no uniquely appropriate categories. One does what is necessary to convey an understanding to a particular audience. There are many ways of catching a possum. In his function as an interpreter, the critic’s first job is to discover which possum he should catch. (139)

But even if it should be the case, as Hirsch believes, that the “possum” which a critic should catch is always that provided by the artist, it by no means follows that this fact of ownership ought to be reported in the criticism. And yet questions of the latter sort, about what a critic ought to write and how, are what concern Beardsley and Wimsatt. So, perhaps one would not be remiss in thinking that Hirsch is simply talking past Beardsley and Wimsatt. He gives an intentionalist theory of verbal meaning, they give an anti-intentionalist theory of critical discourse.

Here is how I think there might nevertheless be genuine conflict between Hirsch and metacritical anti-intentionalists. If Hirsch is correct in his analysis of meaning (the details of which, again, I am leaving for the next chapter), then there will be a systematic connection between what an artist intended and what her work means. Hirsch will have supplied, in Fiedler’s terms, a “*coherent* theory of the relationship between the life of the poet and his work.” And if there is such

a theory, it can perhaps be leveraged to metacritical principles. Namely, critics may be seen to be exploiting its consequences in a rigorous enough fashion that the metacritic can recognize such use as obeying appropriate norms.<sup>10</sup> And if, at the same time, Hirsch attenuates the appeal of Beardsley and Wimsatt's own metacritical view, the one which champions what they call "aesthetic criticism," then his own newly leveraged view will seem even more attractive.

Hirsch does not quite put his argument in such terms, but much of what he is doing can be so described. The problem with his not explicitly putting his argument in such terms is that those who looked to him for guidance in constructing their view did not see the importance of leveraging what we may call a first-order theory of meaning to a higher-order theory of critical discourse, the latter being, I have said, the true site of controversy in the intentionalism debate.

## 1.2 Metacriticism

The question is not whether we shall talk, but whether we shall do it well or badly.  
We must try not to talk too much or too soon, or trivially, or incorrectly, or  
irrelevantly, or misleadingly.

— Monroe C. Beardsley<sup>11</sup>

I conclude by more explicitly formulating the relevant metacritical question about intentions, the one to which I will be addressing myself in the rest of the thesis. Important to consider here will be Beardsley's overtly metacritical view of the discipline of aesthetics. My claim is that this methodological view of his has been insufficiently brought to bear on his anti-intentionalism. I have so far construed Beardsley and Wimsatt's points as metacritical largely on the basis of local evidence and (what I take to be) common sense readings. Here I motivate this construal more indirectly, as what Beardsley must have meant given his background methodological views.

<sup>10</sup>. The way Hirsch (1976) puts such a thought is that "theory codifies *ex post facto* the interpretive norms we already prefer" (76).

<sup>11</sup>. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. 1958. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 7.

According to Beardsley, aesthetics as a “field of study” “consists of a rather heterogeneous collection of problems: those that arise when we make a serious effort to say something true and warranted about a work of art” (1958, 3). The aesthetician attempts, more specifically, to discover “those principles that are required for clarifying and confirming critical statements. Aesthetics can be thought of, then, as the philosophy of criticism, or *metacriticism*” (3-4). To make his case, Beardsley compares aesthetics to “two other fields of philosophy: ethics and philosophy of science.” This ends up being more complicated than he lets on.

He notes that ethics “undertakes the examination of moral statements,” such as “It is wrong to kill,” about which it asks “What does the word ‘wrong’ mean?”; but his own qualification that this is just “one branch of ethics,” namely meta-ethics, should have alerted him to the fact that an equally important branch concerns itself not with the meaning of terms but with normative theory. Then there is the more recent branch, applied ethics, which brings to bear the results of the others on particular moral problems. All of this somewhat disrupts Beardsley’s case.

The comparison to the philosophy of science is probably more representative of what he has in mind, for here there is a recognizable expert to whom the philosopher must defer on “first-order” questions. Beardsley observes that it is the “task of the physical scientist to provide us with true theories about the properties of subatomic particles, electrons, protons, mesons, etc. But as philosophers we are interested in other questions,” for instance: “Do these particles really exist, independently of the human mind?” (4). In the analogy envisioned by Beardsley, the natural world is to the scientist what the artworld is to the critic, and the scientist is to the philosopher of science what the critic is to the philosopher of art. Recall the three-level hierarchy I mentioned earlier: consumers of works read criticism the norms of which are argued over by metacritics. The level of consuming or experiencing works is that of the *phenomena*. The level of the critic is that of *talk* about the phenomena. And, finally, the level of the philosopher (or metacritic) is said to be that of the *concepts* underlying such talk. Aesthetics is “concerned with the nature and basis of criticism—in the broad sense of this term—just as criticism itself is concerned

with works of art" (6).

In addition, just as "studying philosophy of science does not qualify you to be a scientist," "[s]o, too, studying aesthetics does not make you a critic, still less a painter or a poet" (4). And "neither aesthetics nor criticism can be carried on independently of the other; though each has its own tasks, they depend upon each other." Aesthetics depends on criticism in that "we can't do aesthetics until we have some critical statements to work on." And criticism depends on aesthetics in that "for the sake of reasonable criticism ... aesthetic questions must be asked." For instance, when a critic says that "Bruckner was earnest and honest," it must be asked, not "Was Bruckner honest?," but "How do you *tell* whether a composer is honest or not?"; "Is biographical evidence relevant here, or is honesty audible in the music itself?" (5).

Philosophers will be happy to accept the latter claim (of their relevance to the practice of criticism), but maybe not the former (of their own inquiries needing to be filtered through the data of criticism).<sup>12</sup> I do not get into this larger methodological question here, for my interest is only in how such ideas of Beardsley's informed his stance in the intentionalism debate (and the very conception of the debate that we have inherited from him and Wimsatt).

Beardsley in fact acknowledges that not everyone will agree with his methodological views. In particular, many philosophers will wish to "include among the problems of aesthetics the nature of the creative process itself: what social and psychological conditions move the painter and poet, and how they go about their work" (6). But, for Beardsley, aesthetics properly "take[s] as central the situation in which someone is confronted with a finished work, and is trying to understand it and to decide how good it is." Beardsley thus makes a distinction between "*psychological aesthetics*" and "*philosophical aesthetics*," the former of which "deals with questions about the causes and effects of works of art" while the latter with "questions about the meaning and truth of critical statements." Psychology is not always irrelevant—"we cannot ignore psychology"—but its "data and conclusions" merely "bear upon ours at many points" (e.g. concerning "the nature of aesthetic experience") and are never the central focus.

12. Shusterman (2002) objects that, "[a]s merely metacriticism, aesthetics seems essentially a handmaiden to criticism, thus ensuring its marginal place in analytic philosophy" (32).

It is therefore no surprise that Beardsley conceives of the debate over intentions as a debate over how critics talk, for as a debate in philosophical aesthetics it perforce is, for him, a debate that begins from the standpoint of criticism. This point deserves more attention than it seems to me to have received in the literature. Although I spoke earlier of alternative ways of framing the questions of interest, i.e. criticism-first and meaning-first, these are not equivalent in the options that they present to the theorist. A meaning-first theorist is limited by the possible relations between meaning and intention. A criticism-first theorist is limited by the possible relations between critical language and intention-talk. Not only are these *distinct* sets of relations—for they relate different orders of things—but it is also doubtful if there will always be a way to leverage one sort of relation to the other.

Hirsch, as I will soon discuss, takes the operative relation between meaning and intention to be identity of semantic content, and hopes to derive from this a critical relation of a simple sort, viz. evidence of intention may be mentioned in and as criticism when the intention for which it is evidence corresponds to some meaning of the work (which will occur in almost every case, given Hirsch's proposed first-order relation). But critical relations may be far more complex, and have more to do with the rhetorical aims of the institution of criticism than with the semantic (or other) properties of artworks directly.

The latter is the sort of direction in which I would have liked to see the debate go, but internal pressures having to do with the choice of intention as the focal element, and with the charge of confusion between cause and standard, muddled the metacritical waters a bit. Looking at Beardsley's (what we may call) anti-psychologism about aesthetics (which Hirsch manifests as well, incidentally), it is no surprise that he looks askance at any purported relation between cause and standard, more or less taking for granted that there isn't any. This has encouraged his opponents to resist the charge of fallacy by focusing intently on an intention's causal profile.

Quite apart from all this, the error in explanation of which Beardsley and Wimsatt make their accusation of fallacy is still slightly mysterious. We have been told that the "fault" is one of "writing the personal as if it were the poetic." And this has been connected, by Beardsley, to a use of inexpugnably

intentionalistic language. But what exactly counts as “writing the personal as if it were the poetic,” what “use” of inexpugnably intentionalistic terms?

Something Beardsley leaves open is whether the language of criticism is exhausted by critical statements and sentences that may be translated into critical statements (the latter including statements couched in “merely verbal” intentionalistic language)—or, assuming that this is simply true by definition, how exactly we are supposed to determine whether a statement is a critical statement (relevantly “about the work”). The question can already be seen to arise in what are deemed salutary uses of external evidence. Beardsley grants that diaries or notebooks that let us know what an artist intended may be helpful in suggesting hypotheses that we must then test against the work. But how much of this process may or should be recorded in criticism?

Critics talk in all kinds of ways about all kinds of things, with, it is hoped, a central focus on the thing they claim to be focusing on. What Beardsley contends, on his own and earlier with Wimsatt, is that in many actual cases there are parts to such writing which pretend to be what they are not. They pretend to be about the work when they are really only about the artist. However, Beardsley’s account of what it is for a piece of criticism to be about the work is limited to individual sentences (critical statements). If a sentence does not reveal a particular underlying logical form, then it is not about the work.

What about larger chunks of criticism, e.g. paragraphs, pages, or an entire piece, about which we may ask this same question? It seems to me that when a larger chunk of criticism focuses on an individual work, the signs to which we should look to confirm this fact differ from those to which Beardsley looks in such inquiries about individual sentences. In particular, it would be odd to expect every sentence in such a chunk of writing (which claims to be about some particular work) to be “translatable” into something obviously “about the work,” and premature to classify all sentences that are not so translatable as somehow fugitive, mere rhetorical fluff and not really *criticism*.

What we want, again, is to confirm that a piece of writing that claims to be about a certain work really is about that work. According to Beardsley and Wimsatt, reports that the artist intended such-and-such are not, on the face of it, so confirming, do not reassure us that the piece of writing in which they are

found really is about the work it purports to be about. But why not?

The psychological claim about there being a confusion between cause and standard does not help here, for it takes the error for granted and is offered only as a conjecture about how the error could come about (in ostensibly right-thinking people). Why, however, is it an error to begin with to think that one is contributing to one's discussion of a given work by mentioning that the artist intended such-and-such? One answer is that such a report is not *obviously* about the work. Okay, perhaps it isn't. But why should our sense of what a sentence is doing in a piece of criticism, in particular of whether it contributes to that piece being about the work it purports to be about, be determined by whether or not that sentence is "obviously" about the work? This seems overly narrow.

Another answer, the one Beardsley likely had in mind, is that there is always some indeterminacy when one reports (from external sources) what an artist intended, between this being evidence about the work and evidence simply about the artist. The reason there is an indeterminacy, according to Beardsley, is that there are no good critical norms underlying any attempt that may be made, in any individual case, to make reports of what an artist intended part of a larger discussion that is about the work. This, incidentally, is precisely why Hirsch chooses to start from the ground up: he argues for necessary connections between intention and meaning, a recognition of which by critics (even if tacit) is meant to underlie their practice, a recognition of which stable practice is meant, in turn, to underlie a metacritical view that permits the critical relevance of intentions.

In anticipation of such moves, Beardsley insists on the importance of "a general principle of philosophy that is often not kept in mind," that "[i]f two things are distinct ... if they are indeed two, and not one thing under two names ... then the evidence for the existence and nature of one cannot be exactly the same as the evidence for the existence and nature of the other" (19). But, he continues, "[t]his point is obscured where the two things, though distinct, are causally connected, as are presumably the intention and the aesthetic object." How obscured? By the fact, acknowledged by Beardsley, that "what we learn about the artist's intention is indirect evidence of what the object became" (20). At least in some cases. The problem, according to Beardsley, is that there is



nothing systematic we can say about such cases. More troublingly, it is not clear how critics *themselves* can be sure that in adducing intentions they really are succeeding in talking about the work.

I will be sorting out such questions in due course, but what should we make of all this right now? A standard conception of the intentionalism debate takes it to be about evidence, the possible status of intentions as evidence. Even in his final contribution to the debate, Beardsley defines intentionalism along these lines, as “the thesis that facts about the author’s intention, or facts tending to show that the author probably had such-and-such intentions, can give evidential support to the claim that a particular interpretation of a literary work is true or correct” (1982a, 193). This might seem too narrow a definition, but it enjoys a default status in the debate, probably because it represents the way one is naturally disposed to think. This is part of the ingenuity of Beardsley and Wimsatt’s decision to focus on intentions: they accrue to themselves the luxury of deciding how their opponents will defy them.

To see what I mean, consider an attempt to describe intentions as fulfilling a different critical role. Dorothea Krook makes the case that “the critical interest and value of the known authorial intention ... is obviously that of *confirmation*: the statement of authorial intention has the value of confirming the more correct and complete interpretation of the enacted intention” (1974, 367). But how does a report of an intention “confirm” an interpretation? Simply by agreeing with it? Why should such agreement matter? Krook, incidentally, grants that “the author’s voice, as Wimsatt rightly said, can never be an ‘oracle,’ can never have a unique, or even a special authority” (367). So she seems to have some sympathy with Beardsley and Wimsatt. But suppose she did not. Suppose she were a stauncher intentionalist and insisted on a “special authority” for intentions. What could “confirmation” mean then? Would it not just mean that any interpretation that corresponds to what the artist intended is thereby deemed the correct one, i.e. is “confirmed” by the fact of the intention? This, of course, gets us right back to the evidence model. The temptation is simply to hold up the semantic content of the intention as something the work probably means. But why should this be the only way to talk about intentions in relation to a work? It seems that it should not be, but genuine alternatives are difficult

to come by.

The central issue, as I see it, is about one's having, as a critic, legitimate reasons to talk about intentions, or biographical information more generally; in particular, to talk about intentions or biographical information *as such*. The latter condition eliminates Beardsley's "merely verbal" explanation, for it is not merely for the content of what the artist intends but for the fact that it is *she* who intends it that we must be mentioning her intention. One way to follow through on such a desideratum is, indeed, to view reports about intention as evidential, for, quite plausibly, it is only in virtue of its being *the artist* who intended a given thing that we might hold the intention to be evidence of what the work means. Another person's intention (or simply any other vehicle for the intended content) does not matter in the same way. But I think such evidential claims are difficult to motivate, not quite for the standard epistemological reasons (e.g. that intentions are "inaccessible"), but due to the difficulty of formulating adequate critical principles. What this means for the prospects of intentionalism is something to be discussed at length. I do this throughout the thesis, eventually reaching in my final chapter a point at which I put together an intentionalist position that I believe meets the mentioned desideratum—namely, of legitimizing *in and as criticism* talk of intentions *as such*.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Intentions and Interpretation*

I like watching rehearsals: they are far more interesting than performances. One can see in a rehearsal every detail of what has preceded: who loves whom, who is nervous, who is confident, who is vain, who has been bullied by the director, who is admired by the rest of the cast, who is on the verge of tearful disaster. A performance does not wholly conceal such things, but it conceals some of them; whereas here before me lay the whole pattern, or what I liked to think was the whole pattern.

– Margaret Drabble<sup>1</sup>

I have understood the intentional fallacy as the error of “writing the personal as if it were the poetic” (with an emphasis on the *writing*). I have argued that Beardsley and Wimsatt’s psychological claim about critics confusing cause and standard ought to be distinguished from their accusation of error: the psychological claim is designed to explain or make intelligible the alleged prevalence of the error. The error itself, entailed by Beardsley and Wimsatt’s account of “aesthetic criticism,” is that of a critic’s failing to talk about the work she is otherwise or ostensibly talking about. In the present chapter, I examine the arguments concerning this accusation of error—concerning, that is, the thesis of intentionalism.

I myself view intentionalism as the thesis that there are sound critical principles underlying the critic’s practice of making mention of intentions *as such*. I understand the latter qualification (“as such”) to mean, roughly, that critics

1. *The Garrick Year*. 1964. Penguin Books, 83.

are mentioning the artist's intention at least in part due to *its being the artist's intention*. Another way to cast this idea (not without its own complications) is in terms of Beardsley's notion of "inexpugnably intentionalistic language," viz. that language which cannot be "translated" into statements strictly about features of the work. Beardsley's main example of intentionalistic language that *is* so translatable is what we may call loose talk, not really *about* intentions and couched in such language only for convenience. To mention intentions using inexpugnably intentionalistic language is, by contrast, to mention them *as such*.

Although my way of formulating the thesis of intentionalism does, I believe, reflect the target of Beardsley and Wimsatt's objection, the standard formulation owes, instead, to their choice of taking any possible relevance of "writing the personal" to be evidential in nature. On their understanding, as I said at the end of the previous chapter, the intentionalist must establish that evidence of intentions is also evidence of the meaning of the work. I restrict myself in this chapter to arguments advanced under the banner of this standard formulation.

I start by moving beyond the bare notion of a critical statement, which, as I earlier noted, Beardsley somewhat unhelpfully defines as "any statement about a work of art." The particular sort of critical statement in which I will be interested is the interpretive statement, which Beardsley defines as "a statement that purports to declare the 'meaning' of a work of art," where meaning is "a semantical relation between the work itself and something outside the work" (1958, 9). The difference, of course, is that one may say many things about a work of art that do not pertain to its meaning (or, more generally, to the work *qua* work). Although I will continue to speak of criticism generally, my focus in this chapter will be on interpretation and work-meaning.

The intentionalist holds that, in the ideal sort of case, evidence to the effect that the artist had such-and-such intentions constitutes evidence not only of intentions but also of some interpretive claim about the work (that the work has such-and-such meaning). The critic is said to be justified in adducing such evidence in virtue of its *secondary* evidential property, regarding an interpretive claim that the critic wishes to advance. Recall, however, that "general principle" on which Beardsley has insisted: "[i]f two things are distinct ... if they are indeed two, and not one thing under two names ... then the evidence for the

existence and nature of one cannot be exactly the same as the evidence for the existence and nature of the other" (1958, 19). Given this principle, and the fact that the artist's intentions are one thing and the work another, it would seem to follow that evidence of the existence and nature of the artist's intentions is not exactly the same as evidence of the existence and nature of the work.

This would not mean that intentions cannot *ever* be evidence for the work, for it might still be that *some* evidence of the existence and nature of intentions is also evidence of the existence and nature of the work, even if intentions and work are distinct. As I mention in the previous chapter, Beardsley himself allows for cases of this sort, in which the "two things, though distinct, are causally connected." If intentions and work, though distinct, are causally connected, it will sometimes be the case that "what we learn about the artist's intention is *indirect* evidence of what the object became" (20).

Take these as two ways for one to go about arguing for an evidential variety of intentionalism: either in terms of *complete* evidential overlap, where we are dealing with identical things "under two names," or in terms of *partial* evidential overlap, where we are dealing with two things that are causally connected. In the former case, the intentionalist's claim would be that there is somewhere a relevant identity between intentions and work, e.g. intended meaning is identical to work-meaning, so that evidence of the one is *ipso facto* evidence of the other. This is often called *absolute* intentionalism. In the second case, the intentionalist's claim would be that the causal connection between intentions and work makes it possible for some evidence of intentions to also be evidence of the work. This is often called *moderate* intentionalism. I divide my examination of the arguments along these two varieties of intentionalism, and argue that ultimately neither thesis has been successfully defended in prominent arguments.

## 2.1 *Absolute Intentionalism*

Although absolute intentionalism was originally the default intentionalist position—certainly assumed to be so by anti-intentionalists like Beardsley and Wimsatt—contributors to the debate did not have much occasion to think

of matters in terms of absolute/non-absolute until Hirsch, who, somewhat frustratingly, could be read as almost any manner of intentionalist—absolute<sup>2</sup>, moderate<sup>3</sup>, or hypothetical<sup>4</sup>—depending on which of his remarks one took to be representative. Hirsch remains so elusive due partly, I think, to his attempt to solve a problem about criticism in terms of notions which pertain only to meaning. I have described some of what this involves in the previous chapter. Here I extend this analysis as part of a characterization of absolute intentionalism.

Hirsch is indeed most commonly viewed as an absolute intentionalist, and I will so be reading him here. This follows from taking seriously his assertion that “meaning is an affair of consciousness, not of words” (1967, 4). In saying this, he means to subsume work-meaning under intended meaning so that works have meaning only derivatively, in that they point to a consciousness which truly “bears” the meaning. William Irwin, who develops Hirsch’s point, makes this more explicit: “Texts are simply convenient indicators of meaning but truly speaking cannot possess meaning themselves” (1999, 60). On the basis of such a semantic thesis, Hirsch may, using Beardsley’s evidential principle, deduce the claim that any and all evidence of intended meaning is *ipso facto* evidence of work-meaning, for the two terms are identical. Thus, a critic who adduces evidence of the artist’s intention is thereby adducing evidence of what the work means, whether she knows it or not. All such intention-talk is vindicated.

This metacritical way of describing Hirsch’s absolute intentionalism, simple as it may sound, is far enough removed from the standard way to have practical consequences for how different theorists will relate to him. Take, for example, Knapp and Michaels (1985). They are fellow absolute intentionalists who criticize Hirsch for not remaining true to his absolute intentionalist convictions. On my way of putting things, Hirsch turns out to be immune to their criticism, for they simply misconstrue the different levels of theorizing at play. They are,

2. See Beardsley (1970, 17ff) for the canonical reading, to which most subsequent theorists have deferred.

3. See Iseminger (1992) for a sympathetic such reading, and Juhl (1980) and Knapp and Michaels (1985) for an unsympathetic such reading.

4. See Vandeveld (2005), who argues that what Hirsch means by intention is a “construction” of “what belonged to the milieu of the author,” not “what was in the head of the author” (72).

incidentally, self-described “anti-theorists,” but this only adds to the confusion that induces them to make statements such as the following:

once it is seen that the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning, the project of *grounding* meaning in intention becomes incoherent.... The mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author’s intended meaning) to a second term (the text’s meaning), when actually the two terms are the same. (12)

Knapp and Michaels accuse Hirsch of this mistake, and find “odd” his “transition from definition to method” (13). All one must establish, to their mind, is that “textual meaning” *is* “the author’s intended meaning.” But, of course, if the controversy to which Hirsch is addressing himself partly concerns method, then it will make sense that he is eager to draw methodological conclusions from his definition of meaning. This is the case in the intentionalism debate, which Knapp and Michaels incorrectly construe as being, not about criticism, but about the definition of work-meaning.<sup>5</sup>

P. D. Juhl (1980) is another example. He, too, expresses disappointment in Hirsch, not because he sees no need for Hirsch’s “transition from definition to method” but because he does not recognize in Hirsch any such transition at all. He sees Hirsch as simply failing to give a robust enough intentionalist theory of criticism (as opposed to failing, in particular, to leverage his intentionalist theory of meaning to such a theory of criticism). The intentionalist theory of criticism Juhl himself defends is that “there is a logical connection between statements about the meaning of a literary work and statements about the author’s intention such that a statement about the meaning of a work *is* a statement about the author’s intention” (12). Note that this is an explicitly metacritical thesis, about *statements* of meaning rather than about meaning directly. It is, moreover, the same result of absolute intentionalism at which I above arrived on Hirsch’s

5. Hirsch, in a reply, is equally bewildered by Knapp and Michaels, agreeing with the thrust of their argument concerning the definition of work-meaning but claiming to be unable to “see the consequentiality of their argument ... about the *practical nullity* of the idea of intention” (1985, 49, emphasis added).

behalf, using Beardsley's evidential principle. But Juhl does not take Hirsch even to be *trying* to defend such a thesis. On Juhl's construal,

Hirsch believes that there is no logical connection between the meaning of a work and the author's intention. He holds rather that we *ought* to accept the author's intention as the decisive criterion of what a text means, since otherwise literary interpretation will be hopelessly subjective and therefore unable to provide genuine knowledge about the meaning of literary works. Whereas Hirsch is more or less explicitly offering a recommendation as to what critics *ought* to do in interpreting a text—namely, try to ascertain the author's intention—my view is that they are necessarily doing so already, in virtue of what it is for a literary work to have a certain meaning. (12)

The problem, which I think is evident in the quoted passage, is that Juhl is misconstruing certain of Hirsch's remarks as a recommendation for *critics*, when they are really a recommendation for *theorists* (of meaning). The "we" who, Hirsch argues, *ought* to so accept the author's intention are theorists of meaning. By so accepting the author's intention, namely by recognizing that work-meaning *is* intended meaning, we (still theorists) are said to put ourselves in a good position to counter Beardsley and Wimsatt's theory of criticism. Hirsch's theory of criticism, absolute intentionalism, is in fact the same as Juhl's.<sup>6</sup> The distinction between these two levels to Hirsch's argument, first a theory of meaning that secondly is leveraged to a theory of criticism, has thrown off many commentators.

Jack Meiland, from whom Juhl takes direction, follows through more explicitly on such a misreading. He recognizes that it is difficult to maintain that Hirsch is not offering a theory of meaning, given that "Hirsch sometimes [in fact, often] talks in a way which can lead one to the conclusion that he

6. What complicates matters is that, in a subsequent work (1976), Hirsch *does* advance a view on which it is critics who, he says, "ought" to do certain things, namely in the light of certain ethical imperatives. But Hirsch explicitly sets aside such arguments in his earlier work (1967, 26–27). See Meiland (1978, 44) and Irvin (2003, 77) for what I take to be persuasive objections to this ethical argument, which I do not discuss here.



is identifying author's meaning with the meaning of the work" (1978, 27). Meiland's exegetical solution is to explain away such appearances by pointing to "other passages [which] support the view I suggest," that "Hirsch is to be taken as *recommending* that interpretation be a historical inquiry into a past consciousness, that of the author" (28, emphasis added). My view, which I take to be preferable if only because it makes better sense of *all* of Hirsch's remarks, is that these are not mutually exclusive. Hirsch is doing both, "recommending" (to metacritics) the second, metacritical thesis on the basis of "recommending" (to semanticists) the first, semantic thesis. Meiland's own theory is of precisely this two-level sort, on which works are said to have "textual meaning derived from conventions, which meaning can then serve as the criterion for validity for interpretations" (40). But Meiland resists the idea that Hirsch is doing the same with an intentionalist (rather than a conventionalist) theory of meaning.

As we have seen, Knapp and Michaels make the error of taking Hirsch to not need anything more than (in effect) a theory of meaning. Meiland and Juhl, meanwhile, make the error of taking Hirsch to not even be *offering* a theory of meaning. A yet other sort of error is made by Gary Iseminger (who is representative of many contemporary intentionalists in this respect), that of speaking of both types of theorizing simultaneously and without due differentiation. In the context I wish to highlight, Iseminger is discussing the following Hirschian premise: "If exactly one of two interpretive statements about a poem, each of which is compatible with its text, is true, then the true one is the one that applies to the meaning intended by the author" (1992, 77). Iseminger says of this premise that it is "an ontological principle rather than an epistemological one," for it is "not, except indirectly, advice on how one is likely to *find out* which of the two contradictory statements about the poem is true; instead it claims to tell us what makes the true one *true*" (85). My sense, however, is that the given premise is neither an ontological principle nor an epistemological one, if these categories are held to apply to the artwork directly (its nature and how we come to know it, respectively), for the premise is not directly about the artwork at all. It is instead about *interpretive statements* about the artwork, making it a metacritical principle.

It might be replied that not much is to be gained by differentiating the stated

metacritical principle from the semantic(-cum-ontological) principle which it can be seen to imply, for the truth-conditions of interpretive statements straightforwardly reflect the conditions under which works bear meanings. Namely, an interpretive statement that *the work means such-and-such* is true just in case the work means such-and-such. But I believe that differentiating the two types of principle *does* matter, in particular because a theory of criticism may concern itself with subjects other than the truth-conditions of interpretive statements. Indeed, the intentionalism debate revolves around a search for just such a theory of criticism, namely one that is about, not the truth-conditions, but the *relevance* of certain types of statement commonly found in criticism (what I am calling intention-talk).

The absolute intentionalist's claim just happens to be, in effect, that the truth-conditions of interpretive statements are such as to secure a blanket relevance for all sorts of intention-talk. However, it is not such truth-conditions themselves but the underlying theory of meaning which, in addition to entailing certain truth-conditions, would secure a critical relevance for intentions. That is, meaning's being "an affair of consciousness, not of words" entails both (a) that an interpretive statement that *the work means such-and-such* is true just in case the artist intended such-and-such, and (b) that talk of intended meaning *just is* talk of work-meaning. The former consequence must not be given too much attention, for it is the latter which truly addresses the anti-intentionalist.

I have spent so much time on readings of Hirsch's view, more than on Hirsch himself, because these readings are what are important for my purposes (identifying wayward paths in the intentionalism debate). Hirsch, as I have said, is somewhat of an elusive figure. Not much is to be gained these days by teasing out the import of the variety of suggestive comments he makes, especially since his manner of arguing for intentionalism, namely his *meaning-first* approach, is (as I see it) not particularly fruitful. But, due precisely to his influence in the literature, it *is* important to attend to how those who reacted to him were choosing to read him.

### 2.1.1 *The Arguments For*

I turn now to some of the main arguments that have been given for absolute intentionalism, most of them in some sense due to Hirsch. The first argument, explicitly advanced by Hirsch, may be called *the indeterminacy argument*. The second, which has been developed by various of Hirsch's successors, in particular Juhl (1980) and Knapp and Michaels (1985), I will call *the agency argument*, reflecting the emphasis given in such arguments to the notion of the artwork being the product of (normally, human) agency. Although I will be objecting to such arguments, drawing on existing objections in the literature, this itself is, I recognize, no special undertaking given that absolute intentionalism is essentially a vanquished view. My focus will instead be on facilitating my own subsequent objection to both absolute and moderate intentionalism, the affinities between which have not, I claim, been sufficiently appreciated.

The indeterminacy argument is given by Hirsch in the following passage:

Obviously, any brief word sequence could represent quite different complexes of verbal meaning.... But if a determinate word sequence does not in itself necessarily represent one, particular, self-identical, unchanging complex of meaning, then the determinacy of its verbal meaning must be accounted for by some other discriminating force.... That discriminating force must involve an act of will, since unless one particular complex of meaning is *willed* ... there would be no distinction between what an author does mean by a word sequence and what he could mean by it. Determinacy of verbal meaning requires an act of will. (1967, 46-47)

This is an argument for treating meaning as “an affair of consciousness, not of words.” The idea is supposed to be that meaning *must* be an affair of consciousness, in particular of an act of will, because otherwise meaning would not be determinate. Hirsch means something specific by “determinate” (44ff), the details of which need not detain us here—in particular because there does not exist a reading around which a majority of commentators have coalesced. Beardsley reads “determinate” as “unambiguous” (1970, 26), but does so with the impression that he is making the best of an unhelpful notion. In what

follows, I largely skate around this notion, taking it to mean something like *the bare minimum we want from a meaning qua meaning* (my own somewhat clumsy expression).

There are two ways to understand what is going on in the indeterminacy argument. Either we take Hirsch to be playing something like a “numbers” game, where the claim is that, without an authorial will selecting certain meanings, there are (in most cases) simply too many options from which to choose, such that it is implausible for us (as theorists of meaning) to attribute all of them to the works in question;<sup>7</sup> or else we take Hirsch to be making a more philosophical point about the nature of meaning itself, that meaning is not, so to speak, self-standing but always “*somebody’s meaning*” (1967, 3). The latter is typically how Hirsch is read by those who offer what I am calling the agency argument, to which I will attend shortly. Let me first consider, briefly, what I have called the “numbers” construal of the indeterminacy argument.

On this construal, all we seek is a “genuinely discriminating norm,” something that will reliably pare down the overabundant variety of possible meanings that, Hirsch believes, every word sequence can logically support. The author’s will obviously represents such a norm, but, as was evident even to Hirsch, it represents only *one* possible such norm. Why should it be the one that we (again, as theorists of meaning) adopt?

An alternative that Hirsch considers is the norm of “public consensus,” which claims to narrow down the range of possible meanings by pooling the efforts of “every competent reader.” Hirsch does not think this provides sufficient discrimination of the possibilities (13). But how much discrimination do we really want? Most theorists are happy, I think, to allow some sort of pluralism of meaning. Maybe for some of these theorists the pluralism defined by the public consensus, problematic as it is, is sufficiently discriminatory. For instance, Goldman (1990) has a view on which works often support many “acceptable” interpretations, such that (as he says in response to Hirsch) “we can rest content

7. A theorist of meaning may be said to “attribute” meaning to works in the sense of espousing a theory on which works bear meaning in certain ways. A critic, by contrast, may be said to “attribute” meaning to works in the sense of saying of some particular works that they bear some particular meanings.

with [this] indeterminacy or multiplicity" (213).

Hirsch appears to lean monistic, toward a view on which there should always be (as it is often put) "a single right interpretation." But this is not entirely clear, for Hirsch's notion of determinacy can be read, pluralistically, to entail that a work's meanings may be ambiguous. He allows (*pace* Beardsley's interpretation of "determinate") that "most verbal meanings are imprecise and ambiguous," while insisting that "to call them such is to acknowledge their determinacy" (1967, 44). Yet, to say that some meaning is ambiguous is to say that it is ambiguous *between* two or more meanings, in which case those meanings would seem to be separable possibilities.

Thankfully, we may set aside such complications by attending to *other* discriminating norms which, still ignoring the artist, seem to provide just the level of discrimination that Hirsch desires, namely those which refer to *individual* readers. Meiland observes that "the 'reading' of any reader whatsoever of the work" is "just as historically real and determinate as that of the author" (1978, 34). Hirsch might object that it cannot quite be the *will* of some individual reader that could matter, in the way that, he believes, the *will* of the author matters; but if we are concerned simply to achieve a level of discrimination, to effectively pare down the possibilities, then all we need is an effective norm, regardless of where it comes from or how arbitrary it seems.

It therefore appears that Hirsch will have to abandon the "numbers" construal, for Meiland's suggestion (and several like it may be imagined) does seem to provide a "genuinely discriminating norm." It also, incidentally, takes seriously Hirsch's injunction that meaning be *somebody's* meaning, only raising the question of who that somebody should be, the artist or the audience. Juhl, unlike Meiland (who is not an intentionalist), concludes from the possibility of these other genuinely discriminating norms that "the question whether a theory of interpretation provides a genuinely discriminating norm is neither the only nor the most important consideration in assessing its adequacy" (1980, 23-24). What we should attend to is instead the "much more basic consideration ... whether the proposed theory corresponds reasonably well to the way in which we in fact construe literary works—whether, that is, it constitutes a reasonably close approximation to our concept of what it is for a literary work to mean

this rather than that" (24).

Juhl's way of arriving at and defending a theory of criticism differs from Hirsch's way, the latter involving a fundamental theory of meaning from which are drawn conclusions about what critics are really doing in talking about a work. Juhl instead argues at the level of discourse directly. He looks at the sorts of reasons people routinely give for their interpretations, in particular of utterances in ordinary discourse, and concludes that deferring to the speaker's intention is the natural recourse. In other words, Juhl defends the artist's place as the *somebody* whose meaning matters by generalizing on the data of (in particular, ordinary) discourse.

But this isn't the only way in which Juhl argues. Before getting to (what I will call) his *discourse-related argument*, I examine his articulation of what I am calling the agency argument, a premise of which we have already encountered in the proposition that a work's meaning must be *somebody's* meaning. What does this proposition mean, and how could it figure in an argument for intentionalism? As I have said, the central idea, though it will have appeared in various forms across the history of philosophy, is typically traced, in the limited context of the intentionalism debate, to Hirsch's assertion that "meaning is an affair of consciousness, not of words."<sup>8</sup> Words themselves, which make up *texts*, do not bear meaning ("on their own," as it is often said). *Works*, on the other hand, as "utterances," bear meaning, but only derivatively, in virtue of consciousnesses that may be said to generate this meaning. Such is the kind of thought that Iseminger has in mind when, in the passage of his I discuss above, he calls his Hirschian premise an "ontological" principle.

Juhl appears to subscribe more or less wholesale to this kind of thought, if at a metacritical remove. He says of examples of texts "produced by chance," e.g. by monkeys typing randomly or by computers, that they are held by most of us to be meaningless (which for Juhl is the relevant test), even if, ignorant of their provenance, we could easily be led to believe (falsely) that we are making some sense of them. For "our concept of the meaning of a literary work appears

8. A philosopher often brought up in these discussions is John Searle, who had been promoting intention-oriented views of speech acts shortly before Hirsch entered the intentionalism debate. See Searle (1965).

to involve the notion of an author's intentional activity, of his actual use of the words in question to express or convey something" (48). Knapp and Michaels similarly use the example of a "curious sequence of squiggles in the sand" toward the meaningfulness of which one's attitude is said to change depending on one's beliefs about how the squiggles have come about (1985, 15). The argument for intentionalism latent in such remarks may, in its simplest form, be put as follows:

1. It is only as generated in a certain way, namely as the product of intentional activity, that an artwork bears meanings such that it can be interpreted.
2. Therefore, one should interpret an artwork in correspondence with the intentions involved in the intentional activity that generated it.

Let us grant (1), for even if we have quibbles with how it is phrased, some suitably refined version of it is likely to be accepted by most theorists, even by anti-intentionalists.<sup>9</sup> The controversial proposition is (2), and it will readily be seen why the inference to it might not go through. Meiland puts the point succinctly: "it is an additional step from this view that a work must have an author in order to be meaningful to the view that a work must have *the author's meaning* in order to be meaningful" (1978, 38, emphasis added).

Juhl disagrees:

One might object that this argument shows only that what matters is *whether* someone meant something by a word sequence he has produced, not *what* the person meant by it. But it is hard to see why it should matter *that* someone meant something by the words if it does not matter *what* he meant. If an interpretation of a work is not a statement about what someone meant, then why should it matter whether anyone meant anything by it? (1980, 110)

9. Beardsley accepts it: "[The] stipulation that artworks must be 'artifacts,' the product of intentional human activity, is to my mind sound" (1982b, 311). See also Stephen Davies (1991) on what he calls the "artifactual condition," and Grice (1957) on "natural" vs. "non-natural" meaning.

Here is a possible reply which I take to be roughly accurate. The relevance of intentional activity *simpliciter* is that it “types” its products as certain sorts of object, i.e. artifacts, in this case artworks; and objects so typed are thereby susceptible to interpretation. Now, it may matter, to some extent, *what* an artist intended. One often finds views on which, for instance, the artist must have intended to make an artwork (non-circularly defined), or to engage artistic media in specific ways, or whatever else. But this might only be a subject for the definition of art, which does not concern us here. What need not be admitted, in any case, is that in order to interpret works, or to allow that works bear meanings, we must hold artists’ intentions also to *fix* these interpretations or to *specify* these meanings.<sup>10</sup> A more general way to put the point is that a meaning’s being *somebody’s* meaning, to the extent that this must be the case, need not amount to that meaning’s being intended by that somebody; a meaning may be said to be somebody’s in the sense that it accrues to a work only if that work is the product of that person’s (artistically relevant) intentional activity. This doesn’t foreclose the possibility that a work means what the artist intended, but it doesn’t require it either.

So much for the agency argument. I conclude this section by considering Juhl’s discourse-related argument, which will be especially relevant to subsequent chapters. Because he gives many examples, designed to have a cumulative effect, and because I will periodically return to the issues they concern, I here only introduce such examples and give some indication of how I will be treating them.

I call the argument “discourse-related” because it proceeds from observations of how interlocutors understand each other in ordinary discourse. From this Juhl draws conclusions about “our common concept of the meaning of a literary work.” Two things to note about this. First, Juhl presupposes, quite clearly, a certain analogy between ordinary discourse and art, which I mostly ignore here. (I properly take it up in chapter 5.) The second thing to note is that while Juhl *appears* to follow Hirsch’s lead in adopting what I called in the

10. See Beardsley (1982b): “There is no logical disharmony in maintaining that intentions are crucial in making something an artwork but irrelevant to determining what the artwork means and how good it is” (306).



previous chapter a “meaning-first” approach, this is not altogether clear. He couches all of his intentionalist claims in metacritical terms and starts from the data of discourse, but his metacritical conclusion, about there being a “logical connection” between statements about intentions and statements about work-meaning, depends upon his having first established a certain conception of “our common concept of the meaning of a literary work.” He need not, however, take this circuitous route, for he could more simply argue for his metacritical conclusion strictly on the basis of his generalizations on the data of discourse, leaving out the notion of meaning altogether.

Juhl describes the structure of his argument as follows: “I shall consider texts (or utterances) which, under the rules of language, have at least two possible interpretations. I will argue that the author’s intention logically determines which of the linguistically possible interpretations of a text is correct” (47).<sup>11</sup> The following is one of his examples, originally from George Dickie:

Suppose I suddenly realize that what I said to you yesterday was ambiguous. I phone you and straighten things out. Still, what I said yesterday, taken by itself, remains ambiguous; what is no longer ambiguous after the phone conversation is what I *meant* (or intended to say) yesterday. With yesterday’s conversation plus today’s phone conversation, I have now succeeded in saying what I meant to say. When the sentences uttered yesterday and the sentences uttered today are taken as constituting a single disclosure, they mean what I meant all along. (qtd. 91)

Juhl calls the speaker’s first utterance  $u_1$  and his subsequent clarification  $u_2$ . What the speaker intended is  $m_1$  and the other possible meaning  $m_2$ . Though the situation is very abstractly described, we are meant to consider the effect of  $u_2$ . How should it be understood in relation to  $u_1$ ?

Dickie thinks that  $u_1$  remains ambiguous between  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  even after  $u_2$ , and that only  $u_1 + u_2$  means  $m_1$ . Juhl sees things differently. He takes  $u_1$  to have meant  $m_1$  all along (if that is what the speaker truly intended), and  $u_2$  to

11. This, incidentally, is also Iseminger’s strategy. See his Hirschian premise, quoted above.

be merely a clarification of this fact, relieving us, as hearers, of the misapprehension that  $u_1$  is ambiguous or means something else. In defence of such an assessment, Juhl contends that “information about the speaker, concerning his beliefs, feelings, and so on, affects the way we would take the [first] sentence,” for “after the explanation the (first) sentence would surely succeed in conveying to a hearer (unless he wants to misunderstand) what ... [the] speaker means” (53). It is, moreover, precisely to “affect the way his [first] utterance is taken” that the speaker “offer[s] an explanation.”<sup>12</sup>

This is unlikely to convince someone like Dickie (or Beardsley), but I think Juhl is rightly seizing on a certain intuition which is often either ignored or taken for granted. This is that in such cases hearers simply *care more* about what the speaker intended to mean than about what, in some detached sense, his words may be taken to mean. Juhl acknowledges with respect to such cases that “[a]ny competent speaker of English knows that the [first] sentence is ambiguous and what its linguistically possible readings are,” but counters that “although the *sentence* a speaker uses may be ambiguous, it does not follow that his *utterance* of that sentence is ambiguous” (54–55). He concludes that “a speaker’s statement about his intention seems ordinarily to be sufficient to disambiguate his utterance (of an ambiguous sentence)” (55).

Much more needs to be said about such examples, but let the following suffice for now. While Juhl rightly distinguishes between the meanings of sentences and the meanings of utterances, the latter being what sentences mean on given occasions, it is by no means obvious, as Juhl seems to take it to be, that sensitivity to occasion of use should lead us, as theorists, simply to defer to the speaker’s intention (and nothing else). We must be more circumspect about what we concede to the intentionalist here. Even if *what* an artist intended is seen to matter to our sense of how he should be understood, this mattering need not manifest itself in the simple terms of taking work–meaning to be identical to intended meaning. The question of how else it may manifest itself

12. See Stecker (2010): “In conversation, we believe we can grasp the intentions of our interlocutors normally without asking for clarification (*or else asking for clarification would be pointless*)” (146, emphasis added). See also Carroll (1992): “In ordinary language, we are prone to say that when a speaker disambiguates her earlier utterance, she has told us the meaning of the utterance” (106).

pertains to the negotiation of a shift from absolute intentionalism to moderate intentionalism, to which I now turn.

## 2.2 *The Misspeaking Objection*

The shift to moderate intentionalism was precipitated by intentionalists beginning to accept that an artist may “misspeak,” i.e. fail to mean what she intended. I will call the encouragement to recognize such cases *the misspeaking objection* to absolute intentionalism. Let me start by saying that while the misspeaking objection could well suffice to refute absolute intentionalism (for, quite plausibly, there *will* be such cases), it would not, in my view, get at the real problem with absolute intentionalism, which I take to be something more in line with Beardsley and Wimsatt’s objection (as I have been developing it). The real problem, in short, is not that the artist’s intention is too often taken to be what the work means (or vice versa), but that the reasons given for this identification (whenever it is made) presuppose a skewed picture of criticism, one which directs the critic toward the artist rather than toward the work. Even if the moderate intentionalist patches up her view by reducing the number of cases in which intended meanings are identified with work-meanings, she might nevertheless leave herself open to the more serious charge by presupposing the same skewed picture of criticism. Yet, in the absence of this skewed picture, it is not clear how the moderate intentionalist can maintain that intentions are critically relevant. Or so I will argue in this section.

I begin by doing something slightly unusual, decoupling, for the purpose of comparison, what I am calling the misspeaking objection from another objection to which it is often too quickly assimilated, what I will call, following Iseminger, *the Humpty Dumpty objection*. The latter invokes the famous Lewis Carroll character who claimed to be able to mean just what he liked by any given expression (in particular, to mean “a nice knockdown argument” by “glory”). So it is that, on the Humpty Dumpty objection, absolute intentionalism is said to implausibly assume that “a text can mean anything anyone wants it to mean” (Iseminger 1992, 79). The misspeaking objection, meanwhile, is often expressed slightly differently, as the objection that absolute intentionalism fails

to “preserv[e] the intuitive difference between what ends up being *said* (or conveyed) ... and what some agent was *trying* (or aiming) *to say*” (Levinson 1992, 236); or that “it is easy enough to identify [work-]meanings that were not the object of the author’s intentions and which conflict with the latter” (Livingston 2005, 147). Most theorists take these two objections to be equivalent (Iseminger 1996, 321), for both seem to allege that absolute intentionalism is unable to handle cases in which intentions fail. I think, by contrast, that there are complications here of which we should take account, and that taking account of them will deliver us an instructive (if ultimately unsuccessful) rebuttal to the misspeaking objection.

A standard account of the Humpty Dumpty scenario is due to Keith Donnellan (1968). He observes that “Humpty Dumpty believes himself to be the master of the meaning of his words in that if he intends a word to mean such and such then it will mean that when he uses it” (211). But, Donnellan continues, those who take this to constitute an “absurd theory of meaning” might themselves be presupposing an absurd theory of intention, on which nothing “could be easier than forming an intention” (211–212). They might think that there is “no difficulty in the possibility of Humpty Dumpty forming the intention to mean by a word what it does not standardly mean, while at the same time having no reason at all to suppose that his audience, Alice, will understand him” (211). Donnellan believes, instead, that having an intention to mean something involves “expectations regarding one’s audience” (among which is the expectation that one will be understood). Since it is unlikely that Humpty Dumpty expected Alice to understand him, it is also unlikely that he truly *intended* to mean “a nice knockdown argument” by uttering “glory.” If, on the other hand, it were common knowledge that Humpty Dumpty so used the word “glory,” or if he had prefaced his use of “glory” with “an explicit stipulation” to the effect of his definition, then we would be encouraged to think of him as being in a position to form the relevant intention. But none of these conditions obtain in the scenario as described. Thus, one might espouse a Humpty Dumpty theory of meaning consistently with accepting that, in the described scenario, Humpty Dumpty’s use of “glory” did not mean “a nice knockdown argument.” One need not, that is, attribute to Humpty Dumpty a failed intention.

This account of the Humpty Dumpty scenario, which I propose to adopt in what follows, may inform our thoughts about the “misspeaking” phenomenon (rather than vice versa, as is often the case in the literature).<sup>13</sup> An absolute intentionalist could say that in the egregious cases, where it just does not seem like what was intended could possibly be what the utterance means—like in the Humpty Dumpty scenario—it is not that the intention fails but that the speaker simply fails to have the intention. In other, more ambiguous cases, where the intended meaning is conceivably the meaning of what was said (but so is much else), the absolute intentionalist could stick to her guns and say that the intended meaning is indeed the meaning of what was said. This would constitute a certain reply to the misspeaking objection in that it denies that any of the proffered cases are ones in which the intended meaning is not the meaning of what was said.

Let me expand on this point a little. The misspeaking objection focuses on what I have just called (for convenience) the “egregious” cases, especially when it is raised by moderate intentionalists, who are allied with absolute intentionalists on what I have called the “ambiguous” cases. But the reply I have described attempts to bridge the divide, to disabuse moderate intentionalists of their perception that they need to *moderate* absolute intentionalism at all. This goes as follows. Moderate intentionalists conclude from the egregious cases that some account must be given of the “success conditions” on intentions, for only *some* intentions, it now seems, make their presence felt in the work.<sup>14</sup> The absolute intentionalist interjects, saying that the success conditions with which we should be concerned apply not to *intentions* but to the *having* of intentions. In other words, we should push the question of success back a level, such that what is in doubt is not whether the work means what was intended but only whether anything *was* intended. The strategy therefore is to explain egregious cases as those in which the speaker could not have formed the relevant intention (rather than to concede that an intention failed). The absolute intentionalist will, of course, have to tell us *why* the artist is so unable in such cases. One

13. To defend myself against possible charges of begging the question, let me note that Beardsley himself has adopted Donnellan’s account. See Beardsley (1982a, 202–203).

14. See Stecker (2008, 39) and Livingston (2010, 412) for such lines of reasoning.

possibility is simply to defer to the account Donnellan provides with respect to the Humpty Dumpty scenario. Namely, the artist is unable to form the relevant intention in egregious cases because he does not, in such cases, *expect* his audience to understand him.

But is this true of all egregious cases? Could an artist have *unreasonable* such expectations, under a misapprehension about what his utterance will mean? If so, then he would satisfy the conditions on having an intention while still finding himself in an egregious case. Imagine a speaker in Humpty Dumpty's situation who is innocent rather than mischievous. That is, she sincerely, though incorrectly, believes (for whatever reason) that the meaning of "glory" is "a nice knockdown argument," and on this basis expects to be so understood by Alice. Given that the speaker expects to be so understood, her ability to form the relevant intention would, it seems, be secured (at least under Donnellan's account). But now the intuition that the speaker's utterance of "glory" does not mean "a nice knockdown argument" becomes threatening again for the absolute intentionalist, for the speaker here *does* intend what the utterance does not mean. If so, there are success conditions on *intentions*, not merely on the forming of intentions; and the shift to moderate intentionalism again looms.

A number of possible replies are open here to the absolute intentionalist. The most obvious involve coming up with *other* reasons why the speaker in such cases is not in a position to form the relevant intention (granting that she will satisfy the expectation requirement). Such other reasons will have to be plausible, and cohere with our standing thoughts about the nature of intention. But maybe something can be done along these lines.<sup>15</sup> I focus, in any case, on a different sort of reply, one to which I expect even the most sophisticated of the latter sort of manoeuvres will have eventually to resort, that of repudiating any metacritical implications for one's theory of meaning. I will illustrate what I mean using the views of William Irwin, an absolute intentionalist who seems to be forced into making such a reply.

15. Livingston (2005) discusses a variety of possible such conditions, e.g. that one be *able* to do the intended thing (beyond merely *expecting* to be able to do it), or that it be relevantly in one's "control" (11). I don't know if a case can be made that it is not relevantly in the "control" of speakers in egregious cases to do the relevant thing.

Irwin quite clearly adopts the strategy that I have been describing. He holds that “[i]ntention is limited by belief, and thus our ability to intend is more constrained than moderate actual intentionalists typically recognize” (2015, 141). He also follows Donnellan’s account of the Humpty Dumpty situation:

The Humpty Dumpty example would need to be modified only a little for Humpty Dumpty to succeed, such that the words do mean what he wants them to mean. For example, through repeated use, Humpty Dumpty could establish the slang or idiolect convention of meaning a nice knock-down argument by ‘glory’.... [He then] could have a reasonable expectation of being understood by [Alice] the next time. (144)

Note that Irwin, in his modification of the example, ascribes to Humpty Dumpty a “reasonable” expectation of being understood. This differs from the modification I recently considered, in which the expectation is *unreasonable*. An unreasonable expectation of being understood still secures the speaker’s ability to intend, but reinforces the intuition that the intention will fail (for if it is unreasonable for the speaker to expect that he will be understood, this may well be because he is misspeaking). How does Irwin propose to deal with such a case?

His central example is that of J. K. Rowling’s professed intention that one of the characters in her popular *Harry Potter* series, the character of Dumbledore, be gay. Irwin holds that if Rowling genuinely *did* intend that Dumbledore be gay—if this wasn’t just “a thought that occurred to her but which she never intended to communicate by the text”—then her work does indeed have this meaning (i.e. Dumbledore is indeed gay). But one of the conditions on her having this intention is that “she [have] believed it was in principle possible for readers to grasp that meaning” (146). She could believe this either reasonably or unreasonably. Irwin happens to think that such a belief on her part, should she have had it, would have been reasonable. In defence of this claim, he refers us to comments Rowling has made about a relationship between Dumbledore and another male character which, as it is described in the work, could be taken to have sexual undertones (so at least some fans have argued).

It is important to see that Irwin does not take this “textual evidence” by itself to establish that Dumbledore is gay, for it is not conclusive as to this fact. It only opens up the *possibility* that Dumbledore is gay. Given that Dumbledore *could* be read as gay, it is not unreasonable, argues Irwin, for Rowling to have *expected* that he so be read (at least by some people). That is to say, Rowling had a basis on which to reasonably form such an expectation. Thus Irwin’s take on this example is that it is really (in my terms) an ambiguous case, rather than an egregious one.

But Irwin considers a different example (this time fictitious) which he concedes would be egregious: Rowling saying that “she had always intended Hermione Granger to be a vampire” (143). In this case, “absolutely nothing in the text suggests Hermione is a vampire,” and so it is not clear on what basis Rowling’s expectation to be so understood could be deemed *reasonable*. Taking Hermione to be a vampire, admits Irwin, “would be the equivalent of saying that ‘glory’ means a nice knock-down argument.” Irwin nevertheless insists that, even in this case, Hermione is a vampire if Rowling truly intended her to be one. Rowling’s expectation to be so understood would be unreasonable, but, to the extent that she *had* this expectation, she could have formed the relevant intention; and, to the extent that she had the relevant intention, her work does mean what she intended. Such is the absolute intentionalist’s position. Yet holding such a position with respect to Hermione’s being a vampire is, Irwin recognizes, deeply counterintuitive. Virtually no critic would accept such a reading even if it were established that Rowling had intended it. It thus seems that the absolute intentionalist must offer, on pain of refutation, some palliative explanation.

Irwin provides one by way of Hirsch’s distinction between meaning and significance. Recall that, for Hirsch, meaning is “that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence,” and significance “names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable” (1967, 8). Irwin proposes to “repurpose” this definition as follows: meaning is as Hirsch says, but significance need not be “based in meaning”; it is rather “any understanding of



the text other than what the author intended" (2015, 144).<sup>16</sup> The utility of this repurposing is supposed to be that, under it,

intentionalist readers have a plurality of possible understandings open to them through significance, even though meaning is strictly limited by authorial intention. Intentionalist readers are not stuck with a single, unpalatable interpretation; they can choose to focus on significance rather than meaning.

So even though the *meaning* of Rowling's novels would include Hermione's being a vampire (if Rowling were to have intended this), its *significance* may include rival "understandings." Given this possibility, a critic may choose to go with some significance that runs contrary to the meaning. Since "most of us would conclude that the text is aesthetically flawed to the extent that we understand it as including the fact that Hermione is a vampire," "[f]or aesthetic reasons it would be preferable to continue to understand the text as if Hermione were not a vampire. That would be the significance of the text that most readers would prefer on aesthetic grounds" (146).

It is worthwhile to pause on this reply, for it is, in my view, a good illustration of contemporary intentionalism's misplaced priorities. It is odd to hear an absolute intentionalist speak disparagingly of being "stuck with a single, unpalatable interpretation," when such a circumstance (minus the pejorative characterization) is precisely what one would have thought absolute intentionalism is seeking. Of course, Irwin does not deny that the unpalatable interpretation is *true*, for the work really *does mean* the unpalatable thing (again, assuming Rowling intended it). Rather, Irwin seems to be advocating a *critical neglect* of this true interpretation given its aesthetic consequences: the work turns out to be "aesthetically flawed" if this interpretation is taken too seriously. This is how the unpalatability is explained. But what sort of discussion are we now having, and how did we get here?

After a number of attempts to push back the alleged failure of intentions to the failure of *having* intentions, the absolute intentionalist has had to confront

16. I imagine Irwin means to say, more carefully, not that significance *does* differ from meaning, but that it *may* so differ.

a case in which it appears to be intentions themselves that have failed. This appearance may be due to our underlying intuition that an intention to mean a given thing is simply not infallible (unlike maybe other kinds of intention, such as an intention to have an intention). In any case, when confronted with such a case, in which the relevant failure cannot be explained as a failure to *have* an intention, the absolute intentionalist chooses finally to abandon his theory of criticism for the sake of his theory of meaning. Namely, he allows that critics should in such cases reject the artist's intended meaning in favour of other, rival meanings—should even prefer the latter as ways to “understand” the work—despite the fact that the artist's intended meaning is the only real meaning of the work. But for what reason is the absolute intentionalist so holding on to his theory of meaning? The original aim, recall, was to leverage an intentionalist theory of meaning to an intentionalist theory of criticism; but here the latter is being forsaken to preserve the former. The plot seems to have been lost.

The moderate intentionalist will grant in egregious cases that the work does not really mean the unpalatable intended thing, and in granting this will take herself to suffer no consequences to her theory of criticism. She will continue to maintain, as the absolute intentionalist no longer can, that the concept of meaning has normative implications for criticism. Namely, any and all meanings of the work, whether intended or not, will fulfill the requisite critical roles of being justifiably reported in criticism, being preferred over rival meanings, being touted as ways to understand the work, and so on. The absolute intentionalist cannot say the same, for there will be a range of work-meanings which for her serve no such critical role.

However, in connection with these gains, the moderate intentionalist also *loses* something. She loses reasons to suppose that intentions as such may be reported in and as criticism. As I earlier explained, the absolute intentionalist has a background theory of meaning (on which meaning is “an affair of consciousness”) that delivers the critical relevance of intentions as such. That this theory also seems to imply that artists may never misspeak (in the sense of intending what their works do not mean) is, of course, a mark against it. But in rejecting this theory of meaning on such grounds (of the misspeaking

objection), the moderate intentionalist creates a new question for herself: how exactly *are* intentions, then, critically relevant?

Moderate intentionalists who do not sufficiently attend to this question run the risk of assuming the absolute intentionalist's answer. This may occur in one of two ways: either by the moderate intentionalist's inconsistently maintaining that work-meaning is distinct from intended meaning while treating the former as having no independent existence, or by her treating only the subclass of *successful* intentions in this special way (as the true site of meaning). The latter does not yield a contradiction, but I will now develop a certain objection to absolute intentionalism, distinct from the misspeaking objection, that will equally apply to this second type of moderate intentionalist, who espouses, in effect, a sort of *delimited* absolute intentionalist theory of meaning.

Consider what it means to take seriously Hirsch's assertion that "meaning is an affair of consciousness, not of words." Irwin, who does take it seriously, rightly draws from it the conclusion that it is "irrelevant ... how a particular meaning is presented in textual form" (1999, 58). Works are simply "clues" to the artist's intention, "convenient and conventional indicators of the meaning that is in the mind." Notice the order of priority here: works are treated as evidence of intentions, rather than vice versa. This sort of consequence has been met with much confusion in the literature, rather than, as I would recommend, frank opposition. For example, when Dickie and Wilson (1995) run up against Hirsch's clear assertion of such a reversed priority, they are puzzled and assume that he must mean something else: "Hirsch must, of course, deny this, because on his theory the movement is from intended meaning to utterance meaning" (237). But this is incorrect. The "movement" is very much from utterance-meaning to intended meaning, for the latter is supposed to be the only genuine meaning.

If the "meaning in the mind" is the real target—everything else presenting only means of discovery—then it begins to seem that Beardsley and Wimsatt were not too far off in characterizing the ensuing picture of criticism as one of "consulting the oracle." Against this picture, Beardsley believes that "works are self-sufficient entities, whose properties are decisive in checking interpretations

and judgments" (1970, 16).<sup>17</sup> This doesn't, of course, mean that intentions will not help us understand a work (they might even be indispensable); but it is to deny that they are the *target* of interpretation. As Wilson, in a separate article, puts it, "[a]n anti-intentionalist need not deny that biographical facts about the artist are relevant to interpreting the work of art, only that the sole or primary relevance such facts can have to interpretation is their bearing on the artist's intentions" (1997, 309). To believe, by contrast, that intentions are the target is to believe that attention to the work is merely contingent, kept up unless and until better evidence comes along (like, say, an exhaustive list of sincerely reported intentions left behind by the artist). The work is very nearly an impediment or obstacle, something to be gotten around.

This consequence is mishandled not just in the manner of Dickie and Wilson, who ignore it, but by Irwin himself, who foregrounds it but adds the qualification that the text is "the most important clue we have as to the meaning of the author" (1999, 61). Sherri Irvin, in a review of the literature, seems to take this to be good enough, noting that "as is now widely acknowledged, the best and most detailed evidence for an author's intentions with respect to work meaning is almost certain to be found in the work itself, and thus ascertaining the author's intentions will involve a very close inspection of the work" (2006, 116). But this is to miss the point that such inspection, no matter how close, will always be *contingent*, and will treat the work as merely a clue to something else.

The problem, of course, is that critics do not normally treat works in this way, as mere clues. Indeed, this is the reason why, as we saw, Irwin eventually has to abandon any hope of predicating an intentionalist theory of criticism on his theory of meaning, for it *does* matter to critics "how a particular meaning is presented in textual form." That Rowling's text gives no indication of Hermione's being a vampire does influence a critic's sense of whether Hermione should be so understood. Irwin may go on taking the

17. See Stephen Davies (1991): "An aesthetic interest in an artwork is an interest in it as the individual that it is, and not an interest in it merely as the means to some independently specifiable end" (185). Also, Lang (1974): "comprehension of the work—and thus confirmation that the data collected elsewhere are at all relevant—must come finally from the object itself" (306).

latter meaning to indeed belong to the work given Rowling's intention, but if this ends up having no relation to whether it is appropriate for critics to talk about this meaning or to invoke Rowling's intention, then perhaps we should question the relevance of such a view to the intentionalism debate.

Such, at least, is my own objection to absolute intentionalism. And a similar objection would apply to moderate intentionalists who attempt to defend the critical relevance of intentions by making their discovery an *aim* of interpretation, for such a way of speaking seems to presuppose that intentions are (in effect) the true *bearers* of meaning. What we need instead, given that the *work* is to be treated as the bearer of meaning and hence as the target of interpretation, is an account of how intentions may *relate* to the work (such that they may justifiably be mentioned in and as criticism).

### 2.3 *Indirect Evidence*

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined two possible ways to defend an evidential version of intentionalism: either in terms of *complete* evidential overlap or in terms of *partial* evidential overlap. The former, which assumes an identity between intended meaning and work-meaning, is represented by absolute intentionalism. The latter, which relies on there being some other relation between the two concepts, is what I will presently discuss.

As I noted earlier, Beardsley concedes that sometimes "what we learn about the artist's intention is *indirect* evidence of what the object became" (1958, 20). This may seem tantamount to the thesis of moderate intentionalism—thus, a concession—but I think the qualifier, "indirect," is significant. Although Beardsley is here somewhat reticent, it seems to me that he is not very sanguine about the explanatory potential of an account that treats evidence of intentions as indirect evidence of a work's meaning. I will try to describe what difficulties might be entailed in giving such an account, and then underscore why some such account must nevertheless be given if intentionalism of the evidential variety is to be vindicated.

According to Beardsley, direct evidence is "evidence from the direct inspection of the object," while indirect evidence is "evidence from the psychological

and social background of the object, from which we may infer something about the object itself" (1958, 20). He gives the example of a man and his son, who are, of course, distinct, but so related that evidence about either of them may be *indirect* evidence about the other. For instance, "any evidence about the height of either of them will be *indirect* evidence about the height of the other, in virtue of certain laws of genetics, according to which the tallness of the father affects the probability that the son will be tall" (19–20). Indirect evidence forces us to make inferences about the target object: the height of the son is inferred from the known height of the father on the basis of genetic laws. Direct evidence, by contrast, may be delivered by something like ascertaining the son's height using a tape measure.

It is worth asking if the latter sort of procedure, too, entails an inference. Beardsley seems to think not, but it is not clear why. Suppose we measure the son's height in the manner described: we hold the tape against him, mark off the numeral printed on the segment closest to the top of his head, then note down the value. This piece of evidence—the written-down value, so ascertained—certainly seems as "direct" as anything could be. We don't *seem* to need to make any inference to conclude that it is a record of the son's height. But this may only be because the inference is very natural; we are in the habit of employing such a method to figure out a person's height. By contrast, the inference made on the basis of genetic laws, though also in its way natural, may need to be more overt, such that we are forced to represent it to ourselves as we are making it.

The notion that there is an *overt* inferential step in the case of indirect evidence is, I believe, the source of Beardsley's dissatisfaction with such evidence. It is what makes, for him, mention of such evidence, at least in the first instance, not really about the work, hence *prima facie* irrelevant to criticism. Its status as "indirect," however, reflects the circumstance of such evidence having been *made* relevant, just as evidence of the father's height has been *made* relevant to an investigation of the son's height by the investigator's reliance on genetic laws. But evidence of the father's height (direct evidence relative to the father) is not, in the first instance, *about* the son. Similarly, direct evidence about an intention, drawn from "biographical inquiry, through letters, diaries, [and]

workbooks,” is not, in the first instance, about the work. It may serve as *indirect* evidence of the work, but only when it is *made* relevant through the critic’s exploitation of certain “laws” which relate intentions to work. The critic must in such cases make overt inferences from intentional facts to interpretive claims. The grounding of such inferences in sound principles is what will guarantee the relevance to criticism of the sentences in which evidence of intentions is thus reported. This will be the critic’s justification for mentioning intentions *as such*.

I therefore take the relevant point to be, not that an inference is made in the one case (indirect) but not in the other (direct), but that some further account needs to be given of how the former operates. If a critic wishes to use biographical facts as evidence for the work, then she must *make* them relevant to the work, given that, in their most natural aspect, they are not already so relevant (unlike, say, facts about the work’s features, or so-called “internal” evidence).

Beardsley is skeptical about both the scope and the desirability of inferences from biographical facts to interpretations. In his height example, indirect evidence is made relevant through an exploitation of genetic laws. But can something similar can be done with respect to criticism? Are there any “laws” which provide bridge principles relating intentions to works, and which, moreover, *critics themselves* can be seen to be exploiting?

The second issue, at least, may be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties. Beardsley takes criticism to be “a *principled* activity,” but also feels that “in a great deal of criticism they [the principles] are *working under the surface* to give coherence to the discourse, to give cogency to the argument” (1970, 11, second emphasis added). So a critic could be seen to be exploiting the relevant laws or principles, should there be any such, even if she is not explicit that she is doing so, and maybe even if she is not *conscious* of doing so (such that, if one were to ask her, she would not report that she is doing so).<sup>18</sup> But the question remains whether there *are* any such critical principles or laws.

18. Arguably, by being cultured into a given practice of criticism, a critic will come to see certain types of critical reasoning as fruitful and others as unfruitful, despite never having devoted much time to assessing the theoretical underpinnings of such differences.

It will be useful at this point to distinguish principles from laws, in the sense in which Beardsley seems to be thinking of them. Consider, again, the height example. The relevant laws here are *genetic* laws, not “height” laws. But we might think that there are certain “height principles”—namely, principles of reasoning concerning height—that derive their utility in part from their accordance with the relevant genetic laws. Someone in casual conversation who is curious about the height of a certain man but in possession of information only about the height of his father may make certain sound inferences on the basis of commonly accepted “height” principles. She might say: “his father is tall, so he is probably tall.” In saying this, she might not explicitly mention any “height principles,” though she will probably be able to articulate them to some extent if pressed, and probably will not invoke any genetic laws, which she may not be able to articulate at all. But, like many people, she will be used to making such inferences in everyday life, usually to good effect (which explains why the principles continue to be relied upon). One might therefore state the difference between principles and laws as follows. Principles concern discourse while laws concern facts in the world to which a discourse must accommodate itself through principles (so that the discourse may better serve its own function, among other things).

Consider, now, the case of criticism. The alleged principles are *critical* principles, in particular those which facilitate inferences from the facts of intention to the facts of work-meaning. But must these principles furthermore be responsive to any reality beyond themselves? Are there any relevant laws from which they derive their plausibility? While we need not continue to use the vocabulary of “laws,” the standard answer here, which even Beardsley grants, involves the “causal connection” between intentions and work. Though Beardsley grants such a connection, he also, remember, thinks it a “fallacy” to take this to yield a standard of interpretation. I will offer a reconciliation of these two claims in a moment, but first let me underscore the importance routinely accorded in the debate to an intention’s causal profile.

Intentionalists, indeed, have felt this to be important. Hirsch elevates intentions because he believes they constitute a “discriminating force which causes the meaning [of a work] to be *this* instead of *that* or *that*” (1967, 16). Wollheim



is interested in only those intentions which “cause the painter to paint as he does” (1987, 19). Joseph Margolis opposes standard varieties of intentionalism because he thinks that “explanation in interpretive contexts is normally not construed in causal terms” (1992, 44). Alan Goldman similarly takes himself to be rejecting intentionalism in rejecting a view on which “interpreters aim at causal explanation” (1995, 99). Paisley Livingston (2005) draws on a rich philosophical literature to propose the following account of an intention’s success (or “realization”):

- (a) One must “perform, or ... try to perform, some action guided by the plan embedded in that intention.”
- (b) One must “thereby ... bring about a state of affairs in which the situation specified in the plan is matched by relevant features of the actual world.”
- (c) “[T]his situation must be achieved in the right sort of way; in other words, the realization of intention cannot involve ‘deviant’ causal chains, where acting on an intention leads to behaviour that contributes to an outcome which happens to match the intended results, but does so via a bizarre and totally unexpected chain of events.” (11)

All three conditions speak to an intention’s causal profile. In (a), the intention is said to “guide” the action the agent performs. In (b), the action so guided is said to “bring about” the plan of the intention. In (c), this “bringing about” is said to involve no “deviant causal chains” (i.e. no accidents).

The situation of an artist’s intention fulfilling all of Livingston’s conditions would look something like the following. The artist forms an intention to mean such-and-such in a work that he is in the process of creating. He performs some action guided by this intention, attempting to get the developing work to mean such-and-such. He brings about a state of affairs in which the work does mean such-and-such, as he had planned. His so bringing about the work’s meaning occurred not by accident but through the “right” (vague) causal pathways leading from intention to work.

Suppose we accept something like this account of an intention’s causal profile as the relevant “facts in the world” (or “laws”) that should inform the desired

critical principles (relating intentions to work).<sup>19</sup> What sort of critical principles could be constructed on this basis—ones which, moreover, underpin *actual* critical practice? Let us return to Beardsley's skepticism about such principles. He would probably grant everything Livingston says about the causal profile of intentions, but still find it inadequate as a foundation on which to construct critical principles that are useful and that critics can actually be seen to be using. This would be his manner of denying that the "causal connection" between intentions and work renders intentions suitable as standards of interpretation. But what could be his reason for such skepticism?

The answer most likely has to do with our natural preference for direct evidence. We see this clearly in the height example, in which the two types of evidence do not provide equally good information. For who would not prefer the precise numerical value delivered by simple measurement to making vague and shaky inferences on the basis of popular understandings of biological research that itself, even in a laboratory setting, could not deliver anything remotely so precise (certainly not at the time of Beardsley's writing, but probably not even today)? The analogy may be unfair—indeed, intentionalists will surely call it out as such—but it is useful for understanding Beardsley's thinking. Consider a situation he describes in which direct evidence and indirect evidence "go hand in hand—for example, the painter writes in an exhibition catalogue that his painting is balanced in a precise and complicated way, and we go to the painting and see that it *is* so balanced" (1958, 20). Beardsley says that "here there is no problem," but, in fact, the disparity already makes itself felt: learning that the artist intended the work to be such-and-such is usually not something to which we give as much weight as our directly having experienced the work as being such-and-such. This is why a situation in which direct evidence and indirect evidence "conflict, as when a painter tells us one thing and our eyes tell us another," "there *is* a problem," one which Beardsley encourages us to resolve by trusting our eyes (or at least *discourages* us to resolve by *distrusting*

19. Interestingly, Livingston has a separate "meshing" account of successful intentions that concerns only artistic intentions (2009). As far as I can tell, it bears no relation to his causal account. I take this to be indicative of how intentionalists have not adequately described the relevance to interpretation of such causal facts. Livingston, at least, seems to realize that such facts do not themselves present standards of interpretation.

our eyes).<sup>20</sup>

A number of questions suggest themselves here. First, even if indirect evidence is less helpful than direct evidence, can it not still be mentioned? Is it not still relevant, especially in cases where direct evidence is not available? This is a complicated thing to decide. Usually critics *are* in a position to amass the relevant direct evidence, i.e. “see for themselves,” for a critic who has not “directly inspected” a work will probably not be writing about it. There might, of course, be unusual situations in which direct evidence is simply unobtainable, such that the critic must go by a series of different types of indirect evidence (as in the case of lost silent films). However, in such cases the critic himself will admit that he is making the best of a bad situation, one which should not inform our thoughts about the normal state of affairs.

Second, it might always be wondered, against the intentionalist, whether a given piece of evidence about intentions really *is* indirect evidence of the work. For instance, what makes it the case that a critic who reports that a painter claims to have intended that his painting be balanced in a certain way is indeed saying something about the work? It could, of course, turn out that the painting is *not* balanced in that way, but this is not the issue; the critic may still have said something relevant, if sound critical principles are “working under the surface.” So the question remains, even if we think that evidence of intentions may sometimes be indirect evidence of the work, *how* this could be so, both in some given case and generally.

Third, we might wonder if it is fair to hold up legitimate such cases of indirect evidence as representative of much *actual* intention-talk that makes use of inexpugnably intentionalistic language. It might be the case that, even in the best of circumstances, critics are justified in inferring from the artist’s intention only that the work means something *very generally in the vicinity of*

20. As Beardsley could perhaps acknowledge, sometimes we do best to suspend trust in our senses until they are adequately trained, even if ultimately we must not circumvent our senses. Yet even moderate intentionalists, in dealing with such cases, are tempted to fall back to something like the absolute intentionalist’s strategy of denying that the artist truly intended the thing we cannot discern. See, for example, Carroll (1992): “with cases where the authorial pronouncement is so arbitrary, we may discount it, not because we think that authorial intentions are irrelevant [or have failed], but because we think that the report is insincere” (i.e. the artist did not really have the intention) (99).

the intended meaning. But this inference might be so general as to almost never be worth the critic's time. Just as knowing that a man's father was tall may be practically useless if one is interested to know *exactly* how tall the son is, so might knowing that the work means something *vaguely* like what the artist intended be practically useless if one wishes to know something more specific, as critics usually do. This depends on the *use* a critic wants to make of the information, in what context and for what purpose she wants to talk about the given meaning.

All this is to say that there is a need for an account of critical principles that vindicates a wide range of intention-talk, at least if one believes that a wide range of it is acceptable criticism. Contemporary intentionalism, in my view, does not directly address this question. What one finds in the literature from intentionalists are theories of meaning that seek to amend absolute intentionalism in the light of the misspeaking objection. To the extent that they treat the notion of work-meaning as critically normative (unlike Irwin above), they will, of course, incur metacritical commitments. But these need to be teased out and situated in the framework I have proposed.

Consider what might fairly be called the default view among moderate intentionalists, which arose directly out of initial assessments of the misspeaking objection. It may be summarized as follows: when the artist's intended meaning is consistent with the relevant conventions, then the work means what was intended; otherwise, the work means something else or nothing at all. So, for instance, Iseminger claims that the meaning of a work "is the meaning *compatible with the text* that the author intended"—where compatibility with the text is cashed out as compatibility with the *conventional meaning* of the text (1996, 321). More clearly, Noël Carroll claims that "[t]he intentions of authors that the modest actual intentionalist takes seriously are only those intentions of the author that the linguistic literary unit can support (given the conventions of language and literature)" (2001, 198).

It is not difficult to see how one might arrive at such a view from an accommodation of the misspeaking objection. Intuitions that some speaker's utterance didn't really mean what she intended typically depend upon our notion of the conventional meanings of the words used. Or at least it is sufficient

to think so with respect to many of the egregious cases that first come to mind. Humpty Dumpty, supposing him to have genuinely intended to mean “a nice knockdown argument” by “glory,” did not succeed in his intention because, the thought goes, the relevant conventions did not include “a nice knockdown argument” as a possible meaning for “glory.” This is perhaps why alternate scenarios in which such a convention is established beforehand are often felt to deliver a different intuition, of Humpty Dumpty succeeding to mean what he intended.

Robert Stecker has called this “convention-constrained” intentionalism, for it holds that intentions succeed to the extent that they are constrained by conventions (2010, 149). Stecker objects to it on the grounds that convention-constraint is neither necessary nor sufficient for success. He believes that an artist might succeed in her intention despite the intended meaning being unconventional, and that she might *fail* in her intention despite the intended meaning being *conventional*. How one feels about these possibilities depends upon how one feels about certain examples. Stecker adduces examples which he takes to demonstrate each of the two possibilities. But what would this show, even if he is correct? Consider that a convention-constrained intentionalist could attempt the same manoeuvre that I above show Irwin to be attempting, that of divorcing his theory of meaning from his theory of criticism. He could say that, in cases of the first sort, it is not that the unconventional thing is what the work *means*, just that it is how the work should be *understood* (as its significance, or whatever other concept one wishes to introduce). He could similarly say, in Stecker’s second sort of case, that the conventional thing *is* what the work means, just not how the work should be understood.

So the real question is, again, not about meaning, or any other such property of the work (significance, or whatever else). It is instead about certain normative implications bearing on the practice of criticism. Now, Stecker could easily conduct his argument at this normative level—indeed, he already does to the extent that he is reaching conclusions about how we “should understand” certain utterances. But more pressing than the question he considers, viz. whether the biconditional entailed by convention-constrained intentionalism is true, is the question whether such a view is even *relevant*. Namely, does it answer

anti-intentionalism? It seems to me that it does not. Suppose it is true that a work means what its artist intended when this intention is consistent with conventions. So what? Does anything prevent Beardsley and Wimsatt from simply granting this?

One might think that when the intended meaning is indeed what the work means, the critic is justified in reporting this fact about the intention. But why? What makes it, for a critic, a fact not only about the intention but also about the *work*? The mere coincidence of meaning? This will strike many as counterintuitive, for we do not think that mere coincidence of meaning between a given thing and the work makes it critically relevant. Is it the convention-constraint? This seems equally implausible, for it is not clear why something's being consistent with conventions should make it critically relevant to something else (the work) that (let us suppose) is also so consistent.

The convention-constrained intentionalist might say that it is a normative principle in criticism that we should always understand a work to mean what an artist intends when this intention is consistent with conventions, such that critics who engage in intention-talk are tacitly relying on this principle (which "works under the surface"). Their intention-talk is thus justified. But is any of this true? What reason have we for thinking that such a principle is, indeed, operative? For instance, is it really plausible to suppose that critics who push conventional, intended meanings are always relying on this distinct critical principle, and that those who push *unconventional* yet no less intended meanings are relying on some other principle (or no principle at all)? How, in other words, may this principle be seen to operate? As John Martin Ellis observes, our theory must "confront the task of formulating in conceptual terms what causes [critics] to make one kind of move in one situation, but a different one in another kind of situation; it must attempt to formulate and distinguish the aspects of the two kinds of situations that are relevant to their different treatment, and to sort out the factors involved" (1974, 5). It strikes me as unlikely that the convention-constrained intentionalist will have plausible things to say here. That an intention is (un)conventional may affect *how* a critic talks about it, maybe even *whether* she talks about it, but is unlikely to determine why she is even *considering* talking about it (i.e. what "move" she is making).

Something similar may be said of many of the other prominent accounts of moderate intentionalism. All of them offer “success conditions” on intentions, but in doing so largely presuppose that intentions are critically relevant to begin with. Stecker’s own view is that “an intention is realized in a work only if it is possible for an audience to grasp the intention ... [in a way] that is grounded in linguistic, literary, and other relevant conventions or contextually supported extensions or departures from those conventions” (2008, 39). This is a more sophisticated variant of convention-constrained intentionalism, aims to more accurately describe when intended meaning corresponds to work-meaning, but still does not establish that critics are right to concern themselves with intentions in the first place.

Accounts of success conditions attempt, in effect, to approximate the circumstances in which critics arrive at a meaning that the artist also intended. But even if one of these accounts gets this correspondence perfectly right, a background theory is still needed to explain why critics should concern themselves with the correspondence. I find that intentionalists, in trying to come up with increasingly accurate accounts of success conditions, end up making intentions increasingly irrelevant. It becomes less and less clear why it is important that a meaning with certain characteristics, short of being intended, is *also* intended.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps in recognition of this, Stecker splits his arguments between what he calls the “proper aims” issue, which “concerns what interpretations of artworks are trying to accomplish,” and what he calls the “work meaning” issue, which concerns whether or not there is “something that we can identify as the meaning of the work” (2010, 146). Stecker’s answer to the latter is essentially his theory of success conditions. Works indeed have meanings, and these meanings correspond to the contents of successful intentions. Meanwhile, on the subject of the “proper aims” issue, Stecker professes to be a pluralist. He thinks interpreters legitimately have multiple aims, one of which is “discovering the intentions of artists.” But why? What makes this even *one* of the legitimate aims of interpretation? Stecker answers this in his treatment of the following

21. Livingston (2010) so characterizes Stecker’s account, taking it to provide “an intention-independent standard of success, that is, one that does not itself rely on an intention-determined textual meaning” (414).

objection, which is very similar to the aspect of Beardsley and Wimsatt that I have been developing:

One other objection to actual intentions as an aim of art interpretation does not deny that we try to comprehend this sort of thing but denies that it has anything to do with the interpretation of artworks. Rather, it claims it is concerned with the biography of the artist. The argument behind this objection is simple. Intentions belong to people, not things. Artists are people; works are things. Therefore, discovering intentions is finding something out about artists, not artworks. (148)

Beardsley and Wimsatt similarly believe that the personal is one thing, the poetic another, and that to write the one *as if* it were the other is to commit an error.

Stecker's reply is that "although people have intentions and things don't, people's intentions *transmit properties* to the things those people do and make that are *ontologically dependent* on those intentions" (148, emphasis added). Here he seems to flirt with absolute intentionalism in the manner that I describe at the end of the previous section. Or so one might reasonably conclude, taking the mentioned "ontological dependen[ce]" to arise out of meaning's being "an affair of consciousness, not of words." Indeed, Stecker encourages this reading by saying that the critic *aims* at "discovering the intentions of artists," rather than aiming at discovering the meaning of *works* (using intentions as, say, evidence). It is, again, a matter of directionality. At what is the critic directed, the work or the artist?

To be fair, Stecker does retreat to a more complicated position by saying that the foregoing is true only of certain intentions, namely those which "bear ... on the type of thing done or produced" (148). He distinguishes these from intentions which bear on what a work "means or communicates," and therefore makes something like the accommodation I suggest above in my response to the agency argument. But he does not, then, say how the latter sort of intention achieves its relevance to criticism, if not through the mentioned "ontological dependen[ce]." For he continues to hold of both types of intention that "when



we discover artistic intentions, though we do find out something about the artist, we also find out something about the work.” But why? What makes information about intended *meanings* relevant to a critic? A theory of success conditions tells us only about a correspondence, not why this correspondence is worth talking about.<sup>22</sup>

It is easy, I think, for pluralists about aims to elide the latter distinction, because any attempt to explain why criticism *should*, rather than simply *may*, pursue a given aim is dismissed as “dogmatic.” Ellis calls this “wise eclecticism,” the view that “we should stop trying to rule that one kind of evidence for a literary interpretation is in principle better than another (e.g. biographical as distinct from structural) and accept that ad hoc decisions will need to be taken in each case” (1974, 4). Such an attitude “suspends the most unpleasant forms of these arguments and lets different people get on with doing what they want to do” (106). It is what seems to lead, for instance, Berys Gaut to his “patchwork theory,” on which “talk of the meaning of the work” is identified as “talk of a very diverse set of properties,” some of which, such as irony and allusion, are best served by the critic’s attention to the artist’s intentions (1993, 602). But what sort of attention is the latter, even in these limited contexts? Here the theorist typically falls back into the absolute intentionalist’s picture. Göran Hermerén, in giving his moderate intentionalist account of allusion, is explicit that “it is primarily persons that allude ... not texts. Texts can, however, be said to allude to other texts in a secondary or parasitic sense, or as a shorthand for a complex relation” (1992, 216). Such a view, though it may be limited to one type of work-meaning, is still objectionable if one feels that even here the critic should be directed not toward the artist but toward the work.<sup>23</sup>

22. It might be replied that intentions are worth talking about due to their causal connection to a work, as described in Livingston’s account above. But even if we grant this, as I do, we still need to be told how this causal connection underlies critical principles, for the connection itself does not present a standard of interpretation.

23. Alternatively, perhaps certain senses of allusion and irony are simply not as relevant to criticism as is often supposed. That is, they may be straightforwardly biographical rather than aesthetic, in which case it will be no surprise that “to answer a biographical question, biographical evidence is certainly necessary” (Ellis 1974, 131–132). Stephen Davies (1982) argues for something similar with respect to the notion of representation, that what is aesthetically relevant is not representation *per se* (an intentional notion) but what he calls “representational character.”

The lack of a convincing account relating intentions to work has led many commentators to digress as a means of escape. Recall, for instance, the objections that were considered from Fiedler (1952) and Wollheim (1980b) in the first chapter, i.e. that the conception of criticism presupposed by anti-intentionalists is too “atomized.” While Fiedler recognizes that placing “side by side undigested biographical data and uninspired paraphrases” is not sufficient to relate the two (even should they indicate the same meanings), his solution (as I see it) is to give up the quest for such a relation. The line both he and Wollheim adopt is roughly the following: *it is true that critics are talking only about the artist and not about the work, but there is nothing wrong with this; a properly holistic conception of criticism would recognize such discourse as critically relevant.* My own inclination, as I have already indicated, is to deny that Beardsley and Wimsatt are assuming anything overly “atomistic.” It seems to me not only true but also desirable that a form of critical discourse exists which focuses on the single work; indeed, this is just what is commonly meant by “interpretation” (when it is about how the work should be understood). And very likely many of our other discourses about art (concerning, say, the oeuvre of an artist, or traditions and genres) depend upon such an “atomistic” level of criticism, which we may think of as foundational.

The so-called “neo-Wittgensteinians” in the debate seem to me similarly to digress. Colin Lyas, for instance, denies that intention and work-meaning are two terms that need to be reconciled through something like Beardsley’s notion of indirect evidence (1992, 137). But he also denies that work-meaning is therefore to be regarded as a mental entity, derivative of consciousness. Lyas agrees with Beardsley that “if the words do not have a certain [determinate] meaning, then the authorial will cannot give them one,” while also believing, *contra* Beardsley, that “to say that the words of a text have a determinate meaning is to say that a speaker makes his intentions clear in them” (149). It might reasonably be wondered why Beardsley cannot simply accept this consequence, agreeing to disagree about the relevant sense of “intention.” Given such an understanding, the only difference between him and the neo-Wittgensteinians would be terminological, e.g. what Beardsley calls “merely verbal” intentionalistic language the neo-Wittgensteinians will insist on calling “inexpugnably”

intentionalistic, even though there will be no referential difference between their respective characterizations of such language. This in effect is to cede the issue to the anti-intentionalist.<sup>24</sup>

Many other such examples can be given. All of them stem from a theorist's having paid too much attention to his theory of meaning and too little to its normative or metacritical implications. If I am right, then it is such implications that should be made the focus and that should guide any attempt to articulate the relevance of intentions. To know how to go about doing this, however, one must first have a relatively clear idea about the aims of interpretation (Stecker's "proper aims" issue), which is what I attempt next to provide.

24. Dickie (2006) reaches the same conclusion: "When the old conception of intention is replaced with the new neo-Wittgensteinian idea, the problem that Beardsley and other anti-intentionalists were concerned with evaporates. In effect, [the neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalist] is saying that Beardsley was right about his intentionalist opponents, but that both he and his opponents had presupposed a mistaken theory of the nature of intentions" (75). See Wilson (1997, 310) and Staten (2010, 433, n. 18) for related objections.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Aims of Interpretation*

It all comes back to that, to my and your ‘fun’—if we but allow the term its full extension.

– Henry James<sup>1</sup>

My objection to absolute intentionalism has focused on the picture of criticism to which it leads. It is a picture that orients the critic toward the artist, not toward the work. I have charged the moderate intentionalist with unreflectively falling back on such a picture when pressed, with not having any alternative to compensate for the abandonment of the absolute intentionalist’s theory of meaning. In making this charge, I take myself to have incurred something of an obligation to say more about what it is, then, for the critic to be oriented toward the work. I have certain views about this, and they tend toward value-maximization theory (as it is called). My overarching contention is that intentionalism need not be opposed to such a theory, for they simply operate at different levels, the latter at the level of the truth-conditions for interpretive claims and the former at that of the *relevance* of certain kinds of discourse (intention-talk).

In the first section of this chapter I outline and defend the foundations of value-maximization theory. While doing so, I identify an ambiguity that I go on to clarify in a way that will, I hope, not only satisfy the value-maximizer

1. “Preface to ‘The Golden Bowl’.” 1934. In *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, 327–348. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 345.

but also facilitate my own metacritical intentionalist view, the rudiments of which I introduce in the penultimate section.

I should add that my aim is not to launch a vigorous defence of value-maximization theory or of its foundations. This would be a larger undertaking than I have the space for here. I aim merely to develop along a certain line what I take to be plausible versions of each, so as to have something concrete to point to as underlying my metacritical intentionalism. The latter could perhaps supervene on some other such theory of the truth-conditions of interpretive statements, but I happen to agree with value-maximization theory. Even if my fellow intentionalists will not follow me across enemy lines, so to speak, I hope to demonstrate by my efforts that the standard oppositions one finds in the literature miss a good deal of what is possible. They miss, in particular, the *metacritical* nature of Beardsley and Wimsatt's objection to intentionalism, the most important aspects of which lie orthogonal to issues concerning the criteria or truth-conditions of interpretations.

Let me begin by stating the value-maximizer's thesis in the simplest terms possible: *the* aim of interpretation, and of criticism generally, is to maximize the values of works. This is an ambiguous statement, but already in view is the consequence that whether or not we accept an interpretation—that is to say, choose to understand the work according to it, prefer it to rival interpretations, and so on—will fundamentally be a matter of how valuable that interpretation makes the work. Also apparent is how such a thesis could pose a threat to intentionalism. To the extent that interpretations are true in virtue of maximizing value, they cannot also be true in virtue of reporting intentions, given that intended meanings will not always maximize value. As Stecker puts it, “[t]he basic proposal is that the purpose of interpreting artworks is to better appreciate them. The subsidiary claim is that focus on the intention of the artist is not the best route to achieving this, or alternatively, it is to shift our attention from the proper aim of interpretation to a different improper aim” (2010, 147).

Stecker defends intentionalism on a number of grounds. He first says that “intention-oriented criticism can enhance appreciation as well as any other type of criticism.” If this is meant to reconcile the two views, it may be asked how a criticism is “intention-oriented” if its aim is to enhance value (rather than to

discover intentions). Are intentions mentioned because they are *intentions*, or only because the intended meanings enhance value? For it is not enough to say of certain intended meanings that they enhance value, given that this does not establish that their being intended is one of their critically relevant attributes.

Stecker also objects that it is not *merely* enhancing value that should be the aim, but “to do this by pointing to something in the work that is not obvious, or at least by pointing to a nonobvious way the work could be taken” (147). The significance of this is that value-enhancement must be responsive to the nature of the work *qua* work, for perhaps there are ways to enhance a work’s value that do not treat the work *as a work*. But Stecker concludes too quickly that “one route to this is via the actual intentions of artists.” He assumes that to maximize a work’s value through a “deeper understanding” of it requires a critic to adduce evidence of the artist’s intentions. This may be to beg the question, for the value-maximizer is offering a view on which how a work should be understood is determined precisely by value-considerations. We may thereby be led to meanings that, as it happens, are intended, but, again, this is not enough.

Lastly, Stecker objects that “it is simply dogmatic to maintain that enhanced appreciation is *the* goal of art interpretation. Someone may simply want a better understanding of a work, or, more narrowly still, be curious about what an artist intended to do in it” (148). This seems, however, too easy a way to smuggle in intentionalism—recall the “wise eclecticism” I mentioned in the previous chapter—in addition to ignoring, again, that it is precisely in terms of value-considerations that value-maximizers propose to explain how works should be “understood.” We need to be told why curiosity about what an artist intended is curiosity about *the work*—why it is not merely biographical curiosity. A similar burden falls, of course, on the value-maximizer. She needs to tell us why value-maximization is critically relevant. I turn now to an argument for this latter claim.

*3.1 The Aesthetic Argument*

Most arguments for value-maximization take a predictable form. Noël Carroll gives them a useful name, “the aesthetic argument,” and describes as follows their common form:

since the point of consuming art, and of interpretation as an adjunct to artistic consumption, is to maximize aesthetic satisfaction, we should always favour those interpretations that afford the best aesthetic experience that is compatible with established textual meaning conventions. (1992, 114)

Cleaned up, the argument goes as follows:

1. The point of consuming art is to maximize aesthetic satisfaction.
2. The point of interpretation, as an adjunct to artistic consumption, is to promote or aid the point of consuming art.
  - 2a. The point of interpretation is to promote or aid the maximization of aesthetic satisfaction.
3. Interpretations should be selected on the basis of how well they promote or aid the point of consuming art.
  - 3a. Interpretations should be selected on the basis of how well they promote or aid the maximization of aesthetic satisfaction.

I have deliberately made both the second and the third term parasitic on the first, in order to reflect the signal importance of that term. It is what directs the whole argument, for whatever is identified as the point of consuming art is believed to filter down into the aims of interpretation and thus into the criteria for correct interpretations. (1) and (2) are premises. (3) is supposed to follow from (2), in that whatever is the point of interpretation will determine what counts as a correct interpretation. (3a) is supposed to follow from (1) and (3), through a specification of the “point” at issue.<sup>2</sup>

2. One could also derive (3a) from (2a), in the same way one is supposed to be able to derive (3) from (2), except with the point from (1) already substituted in.

The foregoing explanation admittedly raises more questions than it answers, for the argument is deceptive in its apparent simplicity. Carroll spends less time describing the argument than in attacking its soundness. I believe that the argument requires considerable elaboration for us to see how it may even be valid, let alone sound. In the interest of clarifying a number of relevant issues, I spend the rest of this section fleshing out its three terms. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate not only its eminent plausibility but also a latent ambiguity that I will subsequently exploit.

### 3.1.1 *First Term*

To say that there is a point to consuming art is likely to make a claim about the *function* of art. Stephen Davies (1991), who takes up this subject in the context of the definition of art, describes a sense in which concepts may have associated functions:

Many of our classifications arise not so much from an attempt to describe the way the world is as from the quite deliberate imposition upon the world of a structure that derives directly from our needs, interests, and desires. The point of many of our concepts obviously relates to our needs and concerns. For example, we have the concept of food because generally we value our lives, and the maintenance of our lives depends upon our nourishing ourselves in a deliberate, ongoing fashion. (26)

There is often an identifiable reason why we have certain concepts, such that we wouldn't have them if the things held to fall under them did not generally satisfy the reason. The case of food is a good example, because it is only due to our need to conceptually aggregate the nourishing things that the concept of food arose. It is also a good example because it allows us to distinguish a concept's *having a function* from its *being a functional concept*, for, as Davies notes, "[n]ot all things that could nourish us or other creatures are classed as foods" (28). But if the things that do fall under the concept of food, however this classification is made, were not in general nourishing, there would be no such concept.



Davies is inclined to say something of this sort about *art*, that it is not a functional concept but does have a function. What matters for my purposes is the latter issue, whether art *has* a function (and, if so, what the character of this function could be). I will ignore the further question about whether art is a functional concept.

The question whether art has a function is, I hope, easily answered in the affirmative, for it is precisely the sort of concept, like that of food, that owes its existence to our needs and interests. The only pertinent question has to do with the character of its function. Davies opens this inquiry as follows:

Artworks might serve a great many useful functions—as paper weights, investments, topics of conversation at boring parties, and so on—but here the question is: What *distinctive* function (or functions) is served by artworks? In what way are (or were) artworks important enough to us that we feel (or felt) the need to mark them off as a class of their own? (52)

Davies defers for the most part to Beardsley's views, calling them "the most detailed and sophisticated of those available." I propose to do the same, not quite for Davies's reasons but because, first, they are consistent with the views of the value-maximizers I will go on to discuss and, second, because I have a standing interest in Beardsley's anti-intentionalism.

In one of his final comments on the present set of issues, Beardsley chooses to talk in terms of the *aesthetic point of view*: "To adopt the aesthetic point of view with regard to *X* is to take an interest in whatever aesthetic value *X* may possess" (1982c, 19). He goes on to understand a work's aesthetic value in terms of experience: "The aesthetic value of an object is the value it possesses in virtue of its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification" (21). Beardsley is often on these grounds accused of being what is called a "value empiricist," namely one who denies the existence of aesthetic properties or values that cannot be experienced.<sup>3</sup> I will for the most part avoid this controversial subject, for I believe it is possible to hold that it is the function of art to afford a certain

3. See, e.g., Currie (1989), chapter 2.

sort of experience even if it should turn out that some artworks have aesthetic properties or values that may not so be experienced.

I claim that the function of art must involve the making available of certain sorts of experience because having certain sorts of experience is an essential part of the reason why we have the concept of art at all: those of our interests and reasons which sustain the concept of art are interests and reasons in having certain sorts of experience. One can see this if one imagines a world in which what we would otherwise like to call artworks were never experienced. Suppose that “artists” in this world as a matter of course destroy their “artworks” immediately after creating them (in isolation), leaving interested parties with no recourse but to hear an account of the work if the “artist” is willing to provide one. It is not a stretch to conclude that, in such a world, not only would there be no such interested parties, but no distinctive concept of art would freely arise to aggregate all instances of the described practice.

My claim about experience is thus more minimal than related claims that have incurred the ire of those who resist value empiricism. I do not say that all artworks must by definition be capable of providing a certain sort of experience. This would be akin to treating art as a functional concept. Nor do I say that all possible values of an artwork *qua* artwork must be capable of being experienced, which is (perhaps) value empiricism. It is quite possible that some artworks run against the grain, so to speak, of the function of art. But I believe it is relatively clear that art is not the sort of thing (like, perhaps, currency) that is functionally unrelated to experience, such that its value has little or nothing to do with its being experienced. How one should think of the sort of experience at issue is, of course, a further question.

We have so far been told by Beardsley that to adopt the aesthetic point of view toward an artwork is to take an interest in the aesthetic gratification that it has the capacity to provide. What, however, is aesthetic gratification, and what does it mean for an artwork to have the capacity to provide it? Here Beardsley returns to some of his familiar themes. He mentions, for instance, an “attention to the formal unity and/or the regional qualities of a complex whole” (1982c,

22). I prefer to explain such ideas in slightly different terms,<sup>4</sup> for which I turn to the value-maximizer Alan Goldman.

Goldman accepts much of what I have already proposed. He believes that “[t]he ordinary concept of art ... includes implicit reference to [a] sort of value or valuable experience,” and that affording such experience is not only “the central function but also ... the primary source of value in art” (1995, 2–3). He holds, moreover, that

if ... it is more than an accident of history and language that various art forms are grouped together under the evaluative concept of fine arts ... then it is not implausible that at least many great works or paradigms share a kind of value that in large part explains the importance of art for many people. This value ought to be also more or less unique to art if its importance cannot be explained by features it has in common with many other institutions and kinds of objects. (7)

A problem Goldman encounters is “how to acknowledge th[e] value-producing features of great artworks without overemphasizing their separate contributions.” He resolves it in terms of “the ways that these separate sources of value interact in relating different elements within works,” which interaction is said to “creat[e] fully engaging and intensely significant experience of these elements and works” (7–8). Aesthetic value is thus said to reside in a work’s

challenge ... to our perceptual, cognitive, and affective capacities, and their full occupation and fulfillment in meeting that challenge, remov[ing] us entirely from the real world of our practical affairs. It is in the ultimately satisfying exercise of these different mental capacities operating together to appreciate the rich relational properties of artworks that I shall argue the primary value of great works is to be found. (8)

Though Goldman talks of “great works,” this is, it seems, for the purpose of describing a paradigm. I take it to be his way of acknowledging, as I do above,

4. But see Beardsley (1958), and also Mathers and Dickie (1963).

that perhaps not all works will manifest such value, or provide such experience, despite the fact that it is part of the *function* of art to do so (great works as a class fulfilling, if anything does, this function).<sup>5</sup>

Like many value-maximizers, Goldman is somewhat uncomfortable talking of “bad art.” He claims that “[w]hether there can be bad art (or bad fine art) is at least controversial given the ordinary concept. But even if this category were granted, genuine art should still be intended by its producers or judged by its displayers to afford valuable experience” (1995, 2). The first disjunct (“should still be intended by its producers...”) brings us close to taking art to be a functional concept. I have no desire to do this (though it may be true). The second disjunct, about how works should be *judged*, is the subject of the second term of the Aesthetic Argument, to which I will turn shortly. Before doing so, let me consider an important challenge to the foregoing conception of aesthetic value.

Carroll, with whom I began, does not think that the value associated with the function of art can be restricted to *aesthetic* value. Set aside, for convenience, the terminological issue having to do with distinguishing the “aesthetic” from the “artistic.” The substantive disagreement here is that Carroll does not take the characteristic values of art to be exhausted by the sort of thing Goldman describes, whatever we call that. According to Carroll,

in dealing with artworks we have more interests than aesthetic interests—as “aesthetic interests” are usually construed within the philosophical tradition—and ... there is no reason to think that these [other] interests are always trumped by aesthetic ones. (1992, 117)

The chief such other interest Carroll mentions is one that he calls “conversational.” He proposes that our experience of a work is “roughly analogous to a conversation.” By this he means that such experiences “involve a sense of

5. Such a conception of aesthetic value is not, I should add, unique to Goldman, as he himself makes clear. Kant, for instance, similarly took such value to lie, as Goldman says, “in the harmonious exercise of the faculties of imagination and understanding in free play, without the imposition of concepts or rules that could reveal a fixed purpose to the aesthetic object” (1995, 9).

community or communion that ... rests on communication," such that they require, in order to be "fulfilling," "that we have the conviction of having grasped what our interlocutor meant or intended to say" (118). The claim is that it is part of the function of art to provide not only aesthetic experience of the sort Goldman describes, but also *conversational* experience of the sort that he (Carroll) describes.

I am inclined to reject this claim, at least as it pertains to the *function* of art.<sup>6</sup> Goldman encounters a claim such as Carroll's in the Tolstoyan view that art is "a means to communicate or arouse emotions," a view which "cite[s] the human need to communicate feelings [and] the communal bonds created when emotions are shared" (1995, 4). He objects on the grounds that such a view does not "indicate a value ... that is not to be readily found outside art," or "that can[not] be achieved in other ways as well," for "there are more direct ways to communicate emotions ... and better ways to study psychology" (4). While I agree with Goldman's conclusion, I am not sure about the reason he gives. Someone like Carroll could reply that, in fact, art is peculiarly situated to communicate emotion and to offer studies in psychology. (How this could go may easily be imagined.)

The objection must therefore be slightly different, not that conversational experiences can be had otherwise, but that to take art to be principally concerned with them (so as to make their facilitation a *function*) is somehow to distort what we take art to be in the business of doing. Here I offer a variant of my objection to absolute intentionalism from the previous chapter. I said there that taking seriously what absolute intentionalists propose orients the critic toward the artist rather than toward the work. It seems to me that this intentionalist view of the function of art does the same. If we take it to be a function of art to afford conversational experiences, such that getting one's interlocutor right is paramount, then we are conceiving of a practice in which the artwork itself is less important than what it is being used by the artist to convey.<sup>7</sup> This is

6. See chapter 5 for an extended discussion of the analogy.

7. See, e.g., Stecker (1993), who at times admits as much: "When we are involved in a conversation, we are just as, if not more, interested in what our interlocutor intends to say as what she does say" (473). I raised such a point in the previous chapter in my discussion of what I called Juhl's discourse-related argument.

to reverse the order of priority. Even if it is important that artworks are used by their artists to convey things, such conveyance cannot be the reason why we have artworks. For if it was, then the practice both of art and of criticism would look very different. There would, for instance, be little need to scrutinize works from which we did not believe we could extract the artist's intentions, or whose artists had manifested their intentions elsewhere, in some more readily comprehensible form.<sup>8</sup>

Carroll may try to turn the objection around on me. He might say that to take art to be in the business of affording satisfying aesthetic experience orients us too much toward such experience, at the expense of the work. He does in fact say something like this in his objection that the value-maximizer "presume[s] a species of aesthetic hedonism" (1992, 122). He invokes "Robert Nozick's very provocative, antihedonistic thought experiment" in which one is asked if one would like to be plugged into "an experience machine that would give [one] any experience [one] desired" (qtd. 122). Carroll agrees with Nozick's conclusion that "our answer here will be obviously no," for "the pleasure of these simulated experiences is not enough; we have a stake in actually having the experiences in question."

My reply is that the analogy does not hold up (even if we agree with Nozick's somewhat contentious take on his thought experiment). Carroll imagines an opposition between the intentionalist who encourages "really encountering interesting and brilliant authors" and the value-maximizer who encourages "counterfeiting such encounters" (123). But the latter is not characteristic of the value-maximizer, who, in promoting the value of aesthetic experience, is not asking anybody to counterfeit anything. In fact, the value-maximizer's analysis

8. Michael Oakeshott ([1959] 1991) makes a point that supplements my own: "the opportunities which works of art (some more so than others) give for the neglect of their poetic character may also be an oblique means of getting themselves recognized in their poetic character. Our attention may be attracted to a work of art, in the first place, for some entirely extraneous reason—because it seems to represent something in the practical world which is familiar to us or of special interest, because it supplies us with a piece of historical information we have been seeking, because some detail catches our fancy, or merely because it is the work of a friend or an acquaintance—but having, in this manner, been lured into looking or listening, the mood of contemplation may supervene and its proper character as a poetic image may, suddenly or gradually, come to impose itself upon us" (538–539).

does not mention encounters with artists at all, neither real nor fake. (This will become especially clear in the example with which I conclude this chapter.)

In general, I do not think that my objection to Carroll's claim about the function of art may be turned around on me, for it seems to me that to be oriented toward (what Goldman characterizes as) the aesthetic experience a work affords just *is* to be oriented toward the work *as a work*. I can't see how the same may be said of the intentionalist alternative, that to be oriented toward the artist (or what she wanted to communicate) just *is* to be oriented toward the work *as a work*. The absolute intentionalist tries to maintain this through her theory of meaning, but the infelicity of such a position is frequently brought out in the context of critical practice (as in my discussion of Irwin). The moderate intentionalist has no way even to maintain the position, plausibly or implausibly.

### 3.1.2 Second Term

I turn now to the Aesthetic Argument's second term, which states that the point of interpretation is to promote or aid the point of consuming art. We have at this point established that the point of consuming art is to have aesthetically satisfying experiences. We have also established something of a precedent for dealing with "...point of..." claims, namely in terms of function. To say that interpretation has such-and-such a point is to say that this is its function—that this satisfies the needs and interests in the service of which we so aggregate the things that fall under the concept. Let us examine this premise, and see where it gets us in the hands of the value-maximizer.

Beardsley, in another one of his later essays (1982d), describes two models of criticism. One is what he calls the "*Consumers' Union model of (professional) criticism*" (CU), and the other what he calls "*the press agent (or PA) model of criticism*." On the way to these models, which I will discuss in a moment, he makes a crucial distinction: between "critic" as a role that any of us may assume and "critic" as a professional status. The latter applies to "one who makes criticism his occupation: one whose function is not merely to criticize but to help others make their criticisms" (149). In this stricter sense, critics are "those who set themselves up, or are set up by others, to make public judgments for

the purpose of guiding the choices of others who are less qualified than they, perhaps by the lack of talent or time.”

I propose to adopt this stricter definition as a paradigm, with the understanding that it is meant not quite to exclude those who have not so made criticism their “occupation” but to render their activity explanatorily secondary (in the present context). My claim is that, to understand the *function* of criticism (and by extension of interpretation), we must look to people who have made criticism their occupation, or at least to this occupation itself, which most clearly enshrines those of our needs and interests in the service of which we have a concept of criticism in the first place.

I imagine that Beardsley had something like this in mind, for he reasons from what he calls the “normative authority” implicit in this stricter definition to his CU model, on which, in the manner of “the specialist in *Consumer Reports*,” “the critic’s primary obligation is to the consumer of art—the audience, the viewer, the reader, the listener. His service is a public service; he tells us, as best he can, what we need to know to make intelligent choices about works of art” (150). The PA model is an alternative on which “the critic’s primary obligation is not to the consumer, but to the producer—that is, to the artist and, indirectly, to the art itself as a form of enterprise involving many artists, present and future. The critic is the handmaiden of the work, preparing the way for it” (155). These views seem roughly to correspond to the value-maximizer and the intentionalist, respectively. The former takes the primary function of criticism to involve guiding consumers to aesthetic satisfaction, while the latter takes this obligation to involve revealing the “communicative act” in which the artist was engaged.

As I see it, the first, CU model has to be correct as a basic account of the function of criticism. Although interpretations have many benefits, among which are benefits to the artist and, as Beardsley says, “indirectly” to the art itself, these strike me as contingencies rather than as functional necessities, responsive more to how criticism must accommodate itself in the culture than to those of our needs and interests in the service of which the concept arose in the first place. Beardsley therefore is quite right to reach the CU model from his prefatory remarks about the paradigm of the professional critic (“whose



function is not merely to criticize but to help others [viz. consumers] make their criticisms”).

It might be felt that this is not quite to reach, yet, the desired claim that interpretation is an adjunct to artistic *consumption*. All we have said is that it is a function of criticism to help consumers make their *criticisms*, while we needed to have said something about enhancing the consumer's *experience*. This may, however, already be entailed by Beardsley's remarks, for he does not mean that the critic's job is to help the consumer become more like her, a good critic (although this might happen, too). It is rather to help the consumer “make intelligent choices about works of art.” To make an intelligent choice is, in large part, to have some idea of the sort of experience a given work will provide and to decide whether or not one wishes to have that sort of experience. To get better at knowing which works will so aesthetically satisfy, such that one chooses to experience more of them, is to enhance one's overall aesthetic satisfaction in one's engagement with art. This, of course, is in addition to the fact that criticism will (ideally) help us get the most out of the works we *do* choose to experience. The function of criticism may thus be seen to be parasitic on the function of art, for what critics are in the business of doing is enabling art to better fulfill *its* function (of aesthetically satisfying).

Such at least is one way of putting the point, which we have reached on the basis of what we have taken the function of art to be. For it is only because the function of art is to afford certain sorts of experience that the function of criticism is connected to the facilitation of such experience—by, in part, enabling consumers to make “intelligent choices.” Otherwise, if the function of art were something else, what counts as an “intelligent choice” would also be something else. For instance, if the function of art were to communicate the intentions of artists, then intelligent choices for the consumer would involve seeking out not the most aesthetically satisfying but the most “communicative” works—those which best communicate what their artists intended. This seems less plausible as an account of what audiences do (and what critics help them do), which itself is further proof of the value-maximizer's conception of the function of art.

So far so good. We must, however, identify something more specific about

*interpretation*—beyond what it shares with criticism as to its function—in order to reach the conclusion of the Aesthetic Argument. Granted, the function of criticism is *a fortiori* the function of interpretation (given that interpretation is a component of criticism). But *how* does the function of interpretation parasitize upon the function of art? How, that is, does interpretation enable art to better fulfill its function of aesthetically satisfying (or help consumers “make intelligent choices about works of art”)? To answer this, we have to say something about the sort of thing an interpretation is.

### 3.1.3 *Third Term*

Interpretation is frequently held to be a kind of explanation, namely of the meaning of the work (or, if we do not like to talk of meaning, simply of how the work is to be understood). Goldman, who believes this, elaborates as follows:

[I]nterpretation is a certain kind of inference to the best explanation. In interpreting elements of artworks we explain why they are placed in those contexts, for example, to convey a certain meaning, express a certain feeling, or lead into the development section. In interpreting whole works, we explain their artistic points, why they exist as artworks, how they fit into various traditions, what artistic values they serve. (1995, 98)

Goldman admits that this account substantially “leaves open the kind of explanation” at issue. His own preference is for “a kind of teleological explanation,” where the “purposes to which we appeal ... need not be external purposes in the mind of the artist who creates it but may be Kant’s ‘purposiveness without purpose’ internal to the structure of the work” (102). This leads us to “interpret an element of a work by explaining its role in creating artistic value through its contribution to representation or content, expression, or the formal coherence of the work,” and to “interpret a work as a whole by explaining those representational, formal, and expressive qualities that make it artistically valuable.”

Goldman’s argument for this teleological account ends up being very similar to the Aesthetic Argument:

We arrive at this conclusion by considering the fundamental purpose of interpretation itself: to guide perception toward maximal appreciation and therefore a fair evaluation of a work. This purpose also generates the criterion of acceptability for interpretations. The best interpretative explanations are those that guide the perceptions of an audience toward maximal appreciation of a work, those that maximize its value for the audience. (102)

We are not told exactly why we should take the mentioned thing to be “the fundamental purpose of interpretation,” but Goldman seems to have in mind the sort of inference I describe above, from the first term of the Aesthetic Argument to the second term. The function of interpretation is to “guide” consumers to “maximal appreciation” because the function of art is to afford such appreciation. Furthermore, the “criterion of acceptability for interpretations,” falling out of the function of interpretation, selects all and only those interpretations which so guide consumers (to “maximal appreciation”). The latter inference represents the conclusion of the Aesthetic Argument.

But how exactly is the conclusion meant to follow? Note that the specific form of the second term at which I arrive above speaks very generally about art as a whole (or a consumer’s engagement with art as a whole). The claim is that, due to art’s function of affording aesthetic satisfaction, criticism’s function (adjunctive to that of art) is to assist consumers of works to experience such satisfaction. This is still a highly ambiguous claim, and does not really make any practicable demands on critics. Goldman, however, seems to assume that there will be a demand to *maximize the value of every single work*. This requires further examination, if only to understand what is being demanded of critics.

Take, first, the assumption of maximization. This is a word that comes quite naturally to those whom I have been calling value-maximizers, but, when pressed as to its utility, such theorists are quick to shift their position. “I should perhaps have avoided the term ‘maximize,’ with its strongly quantitative connotation,” says Goldman (1991, 246), in response to a challenge from Robert Stecker (1991), who, calling the term a “misnomer,” wonders “what it would be for an interpretation to maximize either the artistic value of the work or a

particular artistic value belonging to it" (243).<sup>9</sup> Goldman acknowledges that "there may be several ways to maximize at a given time," adding that "even if one interpretation of a work is best for a time, it may grow stale" (1991, 246). But it is not clear if he means, as a result, to substitute something else for the notion of maximization. What else is there?

Stephen Davies (2006), another value-maximizer who is uncertain about the nomenclature of his view, suggests the term *satisficing*: "interpreters often aim at satisficing rather than maximizing" (224). He does not say what exactly he means by this, but, as the term is usually understood, it implies some sort of threshold.<sup>10</sup> The idea would be that correct or acceptable interpretations need not make the work *as valuable as possible*, only valuable *up to a point*, or past some threshold. In fact, Goldman says things to this effect as well, in addition to his talk of maximization: "An interpretation is acceptable when it guides an audience to an experience of a work above some *threshold* of value derivable from the work" (1995, 105, emphasis added). So the solution is to deny that the values of works must be maximized; they must instead only be raised above a certain threshold.

But is this revised proposition equally supported by the series of inferences we have been following? The Aesthetic Argument speaks generally of aesthetic satisfaction, so I suppose it is a question whether this means *maximal* satisfaction or some other, possibly lower level. It seems to me that it must mean maximal, for there is no reason to suppose otherwise. If the function of art is to aesthetically satisfy, why is it not thereby to *maximally* so satisfy? What reason have we for demanding any less of the interpretations we allow ourselves to be guided by? Don't we, in seeking out art, want to have experiences that are as aesthetically satisfying as possible? If so, then the satisficing proposal begins to seem arbitrary. Whence a lower threshold?

Perhaps one reason not to require maximally satisfying aesthetic experiences is that there may be such a thing as having, as Beardsley puts it, "too much of

9. This exchange between Stecker and Goldman is based on an earlier article by Goldman (1990), which he extended in his subsequent book (1995). I have been drawing on the latter for his considered views.

10. See Simon (1956). Byron (2004) is a useful introduction.

these good things” (1982c, 34). The worry Beardsley is considering is that “a serious and persistent aesthetic interest will become an enervating hyperaestheticism, a paralysis of will like that reported in advanced cases of psychedelic experience.” But he does not buy it. In his view,

the objects of aesthetic interest—such as harmonious design, good proportions, intense expressiveness—are not drugs, but part of the breath of life. Their cumulative effect is increased sensitization, fuller awareness, a closer touch with the environment and concern for what it is and might be.

In thinking this, he seems to me in line with the Aesthetic Argument, on which, by my lights, the idea is indeed that critics must *maximize* values, not merely achieve some sub-optimal threshold.

Whenever a satisficing proposal is offered as an accommodation of worries about maximizing, there is a danger that we are simply substituting one sort of maximization for another. Michael Byron puts this concern as follows:

Here’s a general approach to arguing that satisficing is not a distinctive choice strategy, but rather just one kind of optimizing strategy. First ask: In virtue of what is an alternative “good enough”? The satisficer as such chooses an alternative because it is, in some way, good enough, whether or not it is the best. Assume that doing so is rational, in some sense. But something about the alternative must rationalize or justify the choice: It is presumably some feature of the alternative that makes it good enough. However the chooser answers this question, the feature(s) mentioned can be built into a conception of good, utility, or whatever according to which the choice is optimizing. (2004, 10)

Whether or not this is true generally, I propose to defend some such claim with respect to the present situation in order to bring satisficers into the fold of a more expansive view of maximization.

Much of the perceived trouble with value-maximization arises from its association with *individual works*. This association is not mandated by the

Aesthetic Argument, nor does it map well onto the practice of critics. There must, of course, be consequences for how individual works are treated, for it would be very odd if the function of interpretation were to maximize the values of works and this had no bearing on how a critic is to treat individual works. But let us say, more specifically, that the function of interpretation might be to maximize the values of works even if it were not the case that this function must be fulfilled by a critic's treating each work in isolation from other works in order to figure out how *that work's value*, alone, could be maximized.

What is the alternative? Here I think the intuitions of theorists such as Fiedler and Wollheim, whom I describe in previous chapters as pushing for a less "atomized" criticism, have some purchase. I still disagree with their contention that the *target* of interpretation must be more expansive than the individual work, but I think that much of what they feel to be true can be captured by a slightly different claim, that the *principles* which underlie a critic's treatment of individual works must be responsive to more than just the consumer's engagement with that individual work. They must be responsive, in addition, to art history, to genres and movements, and, perhaps, to facts about the artist. This last item is, of course, the subject of our controversy, and I will soon defend its place in the list in terms slightly different from those proposed by standard varieties of intentionalism. For the moment let us ignore its presence and carry on characterizing this more expansive conception of value-maximizing.

What are these principles of which I speak, and how do they work? The principles operate to orient a critic toward the work in a certain way, namely the value-maximizing way. They impress on the critic the need to view the work as an object from which a certain sort of valuable experience may be extracted. But they do this, with the integrity of the practice at stake, not by blinding the critic to all but the single encounter with the solitary work. They instead take into account that the people whom the critic is addressing are members of communities which traffic in diverse forms of experience. A critic who acknowledges that experiencing a work in different ways is never in the easy control of a consumer, that such ways have to be "trained into," will understand that what she recommends is likely to have consequences elsewhere if taken seriously. That is, a critic who tells a consumer that a given work ought

to be experienced a certain way is taking on the burden of having to justify not merely the value that so experiencing *that* work will bring to the consumer, but also how training himself to so experience *a* work will affect the consumer's experience going forward, in future encounters with art. The critic is thus endorsing not merely abstract meaning-propositions but ways of experience, in which case the consequences attendant to the latter have to be considered.<sup>11</sup>

This clearly does not get us any sort of easy criterion of the sort the value-maximizer would like. Although it is still true that critics must maximize the values of works in the interpretations they recommend, this notion has been made a little murkier. One subject of dispute will concern the range of works the critic is to take into account. Obviously, the critic is not (nor could she be) privy to the histories of every one of her readers, to what art all these readers have been exposed and are likely to be exposed. So decisions must be made, and these decisions will themselves be norm-governed—in large part, I contend, by the omnipresent consideration of value-maximization. The critic will often place a given work in a web of other works so that each is profitably experienced in association with the others. Such is the case when a critic is considering an artist's oeuvre, or a particular artistic movement. She might even choose to understand a work in the light of a movement of which it is not a part but to which it bears certain affinities. I thus treat value-maximization almost as a meta-criterion, a criterion which governs more local criteria of interpretation. It is not quite that the critic weighs in every single one of her interpretive decisions the different possibilities for value enhancement. It is rather that she gets herself into these local decisions only on the basis of having approached her overall task as one of attempting to enhance the work's value for the consumer.

I believe that my re-framing of value-maximization theory achieves the result at which Goldman and Davies are aiming (or gives them a justification for the result they seem only unstably to assume). They wish to speak of satisficing rather than of maximization, but at the same time to hold on to some notion of

11. Lang (1974) mentions something similar: "certainly the viewer adjusts his expectations in light of a cumulative experience of the capabilities of art as well as of directives posited by the single work" (309).

maximization, for the latter seems to follow from their theory. I reconcile these demands as follows. Maximization is indeed entailed by the underlying theory, by the given conceptions of the function of art and the function of criticism, respectively. Satisficing, or rather something which approximates it, enters the picture as the critic's accommodation of his actual task to the function of his practice. It is not that he is *looking* to reach some sup-optimal threshold of value with respect to any given work, rather that his ambitions as to making value accessible rarely, if ever, apply to single works *in isolation*. They always, instead, are more expansive, taking into account broader sweeps of art history and a consumer's life-long engagement with art. In order to maximize value across these broad sweeps, which pose constraints on the experiential attitudes it is possible (or simply prudent) to adopt with respect to individual works, the critic invariably ends up recommending ways of experiencing individual works that do not make those works as valuable as possible *when considered in isolation* (but perhaps as valuable as possible *in the context of the broad sweeps*).

It is important to see that we arrive at this conception through what I have been calling a *criticism-first* approach. We begin with the question: what ought a critic do? To whom is she speaking, and for what purpose? The alternative, *meaning-first* approach begins by asking: what is the meaning of a work, and how is that determined? To start from the latter perspective is to be forced into a conclusion about the individual work, i.e. that a work means whatever maximizes its value. But to say *this* is likely to miss that the relevant and useful notion of maximization, which follows from the Aesthetic Argument, is a *metacritical* notion, applying to the critic's task, not a *semantic* notion, applying to the properties of individual works irrespective of criticism. Using the former, we are led to explain how the value of an individual work is maximized in terms of the critic's sense of how that work fits (or should fit) into the experiential landscape of the consumers she is addressing. To maximize a work's value is thus not some abstract task involving the calculus of that work alone, but an accommodation of that work into existing histories of art experience.<sup>12</sup>

12. Walton (1970) famously raises a concern about letting value-considerations dictate (in his terms) the category of a work. He observes, namely, that it is always possible to come up with a novel category in which a given work has much higher value than it does in the category in



This explicitly metacritical version of value-maximization—which I believe many value-maximizers could be persuaded to accept—is orthogonal to what will be my metacritical version of intentionalism, in that the former concerns the *truth-conditions* (or “acceptability”-conditions) of interpretive statements whereas the latter will concern only the critical *relevance* of certain kinds of discourse. Under value-maximization, an interpretive statement that *the work means such-and-such* is true (or acceptable) just in case experiencing the work as such-and-such is to maximize its value.<sup>13</sup> But I have no pretensions to making any competing claim for my version of intentionalism, which seeks only to justify intention-talk (of the inexpugnably intentionalistic sort) as critically relevant. So much is sufficient to refute Beardsley and Wimsatt’s anti-intentionalism.

### 3.2 *The Rudiments of Intentionalism*

As we have seen, Goldman takes interpretation to consist in teleological explanation, where the telos is something like aesthetic value. The interpreter asks himself how the elements of the work may fit together to create a valuable experience for the consumer, and recommends those interpretations which he feels allow the work to do this best. (In my refinement, it is the most valuable experience constrained by the critic’s sense of how some wider range of art may be experienced.) An intentionalist alternative Goldman considers is *causal* explanation: “If we held that interpreters aim at causal explanations, then we

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which we normally place it—leading to a counterintuitive result that our usual categories for works are often mistaken. I evade this sort of objection by letting value-considerations always be sensitive to, as I say, existing histories of art experience, to the fact that not all possible modes of experience are relevantly available to consumers of art.

13. Such an account, once my refinement is implemented, could be made to cohere with other accounts that seem to propose competing truth-conditions. For instance, that conventions are important determinants of work-meaning could be understood in terms of value-maximization. The critic judges that consumers will maximize a work’s value in the context of a relevant range of works if she interprets them all, to whatever extent, according to what are (perhaps for this very reason) deemed the relevant conventions. This could also explain why a critic will sometimes *ignore* conventions, namely because she does not believe they will be so value-maximizing. This is a way in which value-considerations may go all the way down, so to speak.

might arrive at the view that they aim to uncover artists' intentions, since these will figure prominently as causes in the production of artworks" (1995, 99). Stecker more or less accepts such a construal (1991, 244). While he denies that interpretations need always be explanations, he seems to agree that to be an intentionalist with respect to those that are is to view them as causal explanations. This is also in line with what many other intentionalists believe. In the previous chapter, I described the importance they place on the causal profile of intentions.

My own view is that it is difficult to construe interpretation as causal explanation, mainly because it is difficult to view aesthetic properties as that sort of explanandum. Goldman, in his assessment of such an intentionalist proposal, does not give much attention to its causal aspect (instead focusing on general intentionalist arguments which do not much have to do with causation). But it is worth inquiring into the causal aspect. What could it mean to give a causal explanation of a work's meanings? Stecker claims that causal explanation amounts to "understand[ing] a work as the product of a particular artist (time, place, tradition, etc.)" (244). But it is only as a *certain* sort of product, namely an *aesthetic* product, that an artwork properly attracts the interest of critics. Typically artworks are many sorts of product: educational, religious, industrial, etc. Not all of these will bear on their aesthetic status, but to many of them will the artist's intentions be *causally* relevant (to the extent that such intentions are causally implicated in bringing about that object with those physical properties). So some discrimination as to cause must be made. But what sort of discrimination?

Recall from the previous chapter that Livingston's (2005) account of an intention's causal profile essentially came down to his third condition, that the "causal chain" between intention and work not be "deviant." Such a condition is usually treated as theoretically given, but I am not sure that it can be, for it seems to do most (if not all) of the explanatory work. In particular, it separates *successful* from *unsuccessful* intentions. And if successful intentions are treated as *ipso facto* aesthetically relevant, as it seems to me they are, then the condition is not merely a causal but also an aesthetic one. And yet, the relation between these two roles, causal and aesthetic, remains unclear. This is one way to understand

Beardsley and Wimsatt's original objection.

Let me put the point slightly differently. An artist's intention is said by intentionalists to sometimes be causally efficacious. But, we might ask, causally efficacious at *what*? To say causally efficacious *at getting the work to mean such-and-such* is to beg the question, for what we are wondering is precisely how an aesthetic notion such as work-meaning may be analyzed purely in terms of an intention's causal profile. That is, the intentionalist needs first to make sense of the very idea of an intention's being causally efficacious at getting the work to bear *aesthetic* properties—in addition, say, to physical properties, many of which will not have anything to do with what the object is like *qua* artwork.<sup>14</sup> Some sort of background theory of aesthetic relevance is needed. Beardsley expresses this thought in terms of the need for critical principles which connect an intention's causal profile to the inferences critics are justified in making (in and as criticism). I have described his skepticism about this in the previous chapter.

Although I propose to leave it open whether any such account of aesthetic relevance, in terms of causation, may succeed, I suggest that causation is not in fact as important to the intentionalist as the obtaining of certain counterfactuals which she chooses to interpret a certain way. In particular:

- (i) Had the artist not intended such-and-such, the work would not have meant such-and-such.

Causation is sometimes *analyzed* in terms of counterfactuals such as (i),<sup>15</sup> so that, if one restricts the alternatives suitably, (i) is entailed by the relevant causal claim. But this does not seem to me strictly necessary. The intentionalist can more directly defend a certain interpretation of (i), which I will describe presently, and forgo reliance on the notion of causation altogether. While an artist's causal powers are certainly necessary to bring about the circumstances in which (i)

14. This admittedly is a very loose way of speaking, for it might be held that a property of the *artwork*, rather than of some physical object with which the artwork is spatially coincident, just *is* an aesthetic property. For the sake of simplicity, I largely gloss over such ontological questions.

15. See Lewis (1973) for a canonical view.

could be true, they need not furthermore enter into the *interpretation* of (i) which is believed to secure the critical relevance of intentions.

What sort of interpretation of (i) is at issue? It seems to be the following: it is *in virtue of* the artist's intending such-and-such that the work means such-and-such. Establishing something like (i) is a very natural way to go about arguing this, for such an interpretation quite easily explains (i), which otherwise would seem very odd. I take such an interpretation to concern (what I will call) "meaning-determining" intentions, those which are said to *determine* meaning.

There is, however, a second sort of counterfactual that intentionalists *could* defend (but seldom do):

- (ii) Had the work not meant such-and-such, the artist would not have intended such-and-such.

Although it might be possible to interpret this in terms of its being in virtue of artists' intentions that works mean what they do, it more naturally lends itself to an interpretation in terms of (what I will call) "meaning-tracking" intentions, those which *track* meaning. So interpreted, (ii) describes a scenario in which a work means what it does only if the artist, astute as he is, undertook to make it mean that.

There are some tricky things concerning counterfactuals which I am largely going to elide in my exposition of (i) and (ii), in particular having to do with relevant alternatives.<sup>16</sup> One might, for instance, wonder if it is possible for different intentions to, as it were, "compensate" for each other, so that (i) is routinely falsified for individual intentions but perhaps not for classes of relevantly similar intentions. Such details will not matter for me, for I do not plan on defending any precise such counterfactual as (i) or (ii). I use them merely for illustrative purposes, to demonstrate two very general theses that intentionalists may try to defend.

It seems to me that what the intentionalist really wishes to establish, behind any talk of causal explanation, is something like one or both of these counterfactuals interpreted in one or both of these ways—often it is ambiguous which

16. See Nozick's (1981) attempt to define such a notion for his (so-called) "truth-tracking" theory of knowledge.

sort of interpretation of which sort of counterfactual is being proposed. I will next describe both kinds of intention, and make some preliminary remarks about how each may be relevant to criticism.

### 3.2.1 *Meaning-Tracking Intentions*

It is difficult to speak in the abstract of an intention's "tracking" work-meaning, absent a theory of meaning which describes something tangible that is (or is not) being tracked. I therefore propose to begin to put to use the value-maximization theory developed above. As I have said, I allow that work-meaning is ultimately or generally determined by value-considerations, such that the truth-conditions of interpretive claims are usefully given in terms of value-maximization. I express this as follows: an interpretive claim that *the work means such-and-such* is true just in case such-and-such maximizes the value of the work. We may on such grounds adopt the following amendments of (i) and (ii), substituting in the appropriate notion of work-meaning:

- (i\*) Had the artist not intended such-and-such, such-and-such would not have maximized the value of the work.
- (ii\*) Had such-and-such not maximized the value of the work, the artist would not have intended such-and-such.

I will continue to focus on (ii\*) when discussing "meaning-tracking" intentions, for it more naturally lends itself to that interpretation.<sup>17</sup> The idea with respect to such intentions is that the artist is astute about value-considerations, about the likely effects on the consumer of the various artistic choices open to her. The artist is able reliably to create a work that is correctly interpreted as it is (based on certain value-considerations) because her intentions track the relevant facts about value-maximization. The artist knows that if he does such-and-such, the ensuing work will be interpreted in such-and-such a way, that if he instead

17. It is also for such convenience that I omit two further counterfactuals in this vicinity, namely (iii) had the work meant such-and-such, the artist would have intended such-and-such, and (iv) had the artist intended such-and-such, the work would have meant such-and-such. These are not, of course, entailed by (i) and (ii), respectively, given that their "antecedents" define different sets of relevant alternatives.

does some other thing, the work will be interpreted in some *other* way, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

There is much that could be said about such a proposal, especially in the light of what I have already said. For instance, it is a feature of my analysis of critical practice that whether or not an interpretation of some work counts as value-maximizing is partly a function of the relevant range of background works against which that work's value is being maximized. (I have also said that the selection of this background is to some extent norm-governed, based on larger considerations of what background makes the work most valuable.) Therefore, whether or not an artist's intentions are to count as "meaning-tracking" will depend in part on whether the value-considerations to which they are sensitive are themselves relativized to the right background range of works. What this means, practically, is that the artist must be working with a consciousness of the right sort of tradition, that which forms the optimal background against which the value of her work may be maximized. If a critic believes that a certain work is to be situated against a background quite different from that envisioned by the artist, this is grounds on which the critic could judge the artist's intentions to *not* track the work's meaning.

Such consequences abound, some of which will be discussed in due course, but it is important first to consider a more fundamental question, about what is supposed to make "meaning-tracking" intentions (should there be any such) *critically relevant* to begin with. An artist who is astute about value-considerations may, of course, put such knowledge to use in offering criticism of her own work, but this is not the sort of thing we are after. We wish to know how a critic, even if it is the artist herself, may *use*—in particular, mention in and as criticism—such knowledge *as known by the artist* (rather than merely as *truths* which *happen* to be known by the artist).

One reason one might think that "meaning-tracking" intentions are not quite relevant, or at least do not quite vindicate the relevance of the artist as such, is that the described circumstance as pertaining to the artist does not seem relevantly different from the same sort of circumstance pertaining to *some*

18. Wollheim (1987) describes a sense of this in terms of "the artist's posture," "his reliance upon the experience that he himself has in front of the picture" (45).

*other person*, not the artist, who also happens to be so astute. Of course, this other person will have no real control over how the artwork comes about, so that, even if she knows what will be the aesthetic outcomes of various artistic choices, she cannot really do anything with this knowledge. But it is not clear, an objector will continue, why the observations of such a person may not still be mentioned in and as criticism if the artist's "meaning-tracking" intentions may be, if what is at issue is only the fact that the given propositional attitudes are reliable. For this other person, too, may be said to possess "meaning-tracking" attitudes, i.e. beliefs if not quite *intentions*.

I bring up such an objection because it usefully highlights the sort of thing I must explain. Let me start by granting that if such a person should be found, one who has "meaning-tracking" attitudes, such of her attitudes may well be critically relevant. I take this to be a desirable outcome, for it will make it possible for critics who cite other, more sensitive critics to still be saying things that are critically relevant. But it depends on whether or not the critic has a way to *integrate* such facts into an ongoing series of critically relevant statements. I thus return to a subject I introduced at the end of the first chapter, that of how it is to be determined whether a piece of discourse is *about* a given work. I there described the issue in terms of Beardsley's somewhat ambiguous notion of a "critical statement," which he defined as "any statement about a work of art." Setting aside the obvious problems having to do with aesthetic vs. non-aesthetic such statements, of interest to me was, and still is, Beardsley's limitation of the issue to *individual* statements. I continue my earlier thoughts by noting that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine of any single statement, simply by looking at *it alone*, whether it is relevantly about the work. For very often a statement achieves its critical relevance by contributing in a certain way to some ongoing piece of discourse that, as a whole, is critically relevant.

It will now be asked what determines whether some ongoing piece of discourse is critically relevant. Let me preface my remarks on this by making clear that I do not propose to give any strict definition of "criticism." We might be tempted to turn to the Aesthetic Argument, but I doubt if it can be of help. For the Aesthetic Argument provides only *functions*, not *definitions*, and it is not clear that "criticism" is a functional concept—or, at least, that it is the

sort of functional concept which the Aesthetic Argument could describe, one according to which something counts as critical discourse only to the extent that it enables consumers of the work to derive aesthetic satisfaction from the work. The latter view does not seem correct, for something may be criticism without being so enabling; it would simply be *bad* criticism. I have described criticism as having a certain function, one which informs its instances, how it is practised, etc. But I do not think I need a full-fledged definition of criticism to engage in the sort of theorizing in which I am interested here.

In the previous chapter, I considered a more specific kind of critical statement, what Beardsley calls an “interpretive statement.” Although there may be much more to criticism than interpretive statements, I restrict my comments to such statements for convenience. For they are important enough to be representative of how things stand with criticism generally. I will say that a statement that is constitutive of a piece of discourse is critically relevant if it contributes to the critic’s ongoing attempt to establish an interpretive statement. To establish an interpretive statement, a critic needs to do more than simply *make* that statement. She needs, for instance, to marshal *evidence*. Thus it is that one way intentions are said to be critically relevant is by their being adduced as evidence. But there may be other ways. Indeed, I will rely on there being other ways. In the fifth chapter, I will describe a sort of “conversational” discourse that critics employ to establish their interpretive statements. A full answer to the present set of questions must, therefore, be deferred until then; but I will go a little further here.

What does it mean for something to “contribute” to the establishing of an interpretive claim? Can anything so contribute? In short, yes. I take it to be untenable, first of all, that the only kinds of statements that are critically relevant are statements of the (logical, if not surface) grammatical form “the work means such-and-such” or “the work has such-and-such value.” So some sort of broadening is called for anyway, if only to reasonably account for the actual language of criticism. It also seems to me untenable, secondly, that we may simply legislate beforehand that certain kinds of fact or statement are



always irrelevant to criticism.<sup>19</sup>

Intentionalists often stop at making this second point, but I urge that it is not enough. For it only acknowledges the openness of the question, leaving unfulfilled the demand for an answer. It is still incumbent on the intentionalist to provide an explanation of how, as she alleges, *this* class of fact or statement, concerning the artist's biography, achieves critical relevance. Beardsley and Wimsatt are skeptical that any critical claims can be made involving intentions *as such*. This is the question I have been pressing from the start. Even if intentions (or facts thereof) may sometimes be mentioned in and as criticism, are they mentioned *as such*? If so, how, or on what grounds? Beardsley and Wimsatt grant that an artist's intention is helpful to mention if it provides a hypothesis of meaning that must then be tested against the work; but in such a case the intention is not mentioned *as such*, for the intended meaning's being intended is not relevant to the critic's interest in it.

Now, it may be objected that even on my proposal it is not quite intentions *as such* but, more accurately, intentions *as meaning-tracking* that are critically relevant. But I do not accept this construal. Granted, if criticism is to maintain a focus on the work, not change the subject, then it is only as relevant to the work (e.g. to its meanings) that intentions could be mentioned in and as criticism. But my solution goes beyond the innocuous use, that of merely providing hypotheses, for on my solution it is not merely the *content* of the intended meaning that makes the intention critically relevant—though in some sense it is just this which is value-maximizing—but also its being *intended*, for part of what it is for the intention to “track” a work-meaning is its being a certain sort of intention, a constituent of a network of mental states of a relevantly astute artist. The standard use a critic makes of “meaning-tracking” intentions is thus sensitive to their being part of the artist's network of mental states.

I will give examples as I proceed, but consider that an example I mentioned near the end of the first chapter, of Dorothea Krook's (1974) view that intentions

19. Compare with Isenberg (1949): “we cannot be sure that there is any *kind* of statement about art, dictated by no matter what interest, which also cannot act as [a critical reason] ... or, in other words, that there is any *kind* of knowledge about art which cannot influence aesthetic appreciation” (331).

serve the critical function of “confirming” interpretations, could be viewed as her treating such intentions as “meaning-tracking.” For she does not think that interpretations are ever true in virtue of the artist’s intentions, but she nevertheless takes these intentions to sometimes be insightful in a critically relevant way. In any event, I continue by making a case such as the above for “meaning-determining” intentions.

### 3.2.2 *Meaning-Determining Intentions*

The class of what I am calling “meaning-determining” intentions may seem to stand in contradiction to the truth-conditions for interpretive claims that I have separately proposed. Namely, if such intentions really do *determine* a work’s meaning, does this not run against the idea that *value-considerations* determine this meaning?

Not necessarily. Let me first reiterate that the class of “meaning-determining” intentions is defined by giving a certain interpretation to (i\*) and (ii\*). Regardless of this interpretation, however, there cannot be a contradiction with my proposed truth-conditions because (i\*) and (ii\*) presuppose that meaning is to be analyzed in terms of value-considerations. My idea, in short, is that if intentions are to be meaning-determining, they can be so only by relevantly determining value-considerations.

But what could that mean? I above quote Stecker as claiming, in one of his responses to the value-maximizer, that “intention-oriented criticism can enhance appreciation as well as any other type of criticism” (2010, 147). It wasn’t clear to me what Stecker meant by a criticism that is intention-oriented but nevertheless enhancing of value. If he meant only that sometimes what the artist intended corresponds to a value-maximizing interpretation, then it would not be enough, for we must be told why the meaning’s being intended, in addition to its being value-maximizing, is one of its critically relevant attributes. It is not an intention-oriented criticism that does not accord intentions any sort of *distinctive* role in interpretation.

What could it be for an intention to have such a distinctive role? It cannot, evidently, be that it is *merely* because a meaning was intended that it is critically

relevant. This is so because (as I have granted) interpretation is fundamentally about value-maximization, such that value-considerations must always enter the explanation. However, if intentions are to be explanatorily helpful to any degree, it equally cannot be that it is *merely* value-considerations which make intended meanings critically relevant. The meaning's being intended must be *part* of the reason why it is critically relevant. This is what it takes for its being intended to be a critically relevant attribute. So, there must be some sort of joint activity between value-considerations and intentional considerations in rendering a certain meaning of interest to the critic (*qua* critic). I will say that an intention is "meaning-determining" if the intended meaning's being intended is part of the reason that it is value-maximizing.

Such a configuration of reasons typically occurs when what the artist intended has (what we may call) *cultural influence*, such that the ways of experience which maximize the value of the work are themselves shaped by the artist's intentions. This may be the sort of thing Beardsley and Wimsatt have in mind with their "intermediate kind of evidence about the character of the author or about private or semi-private meanings attached to words by an author" (1946, 478). They say of such evidence, which they deem legitimate and critically relevant, that "the biography of an author, his use of a word, and the associations which the word had for *him*, are part of the word's history and meaning." This could be so only if such facts about the artist have had enough cultural influence to affect the history and meaning of words.

Here is one possibility of this sort. Artists rarely work in intellectual isolation. What they try to do in their art is informed by what other artists have tried to do or are trying to do (and, in some cases, *will* inform what other artists *will* try to do). If a critic tasked with interpreting some work feels that its artist has had an influence of this sort—on artists of other works that are part of (what I above called) the broad sweep the critic is considering as part of his value-maximization attempt—then he will give a certain unique sort of attention to that artist's intentions (and general intellectual background and ambitions). The more other artists follow or interact with the ambitions and ideas of a given artist, the more likely a critic is to mention these ambitions and ideas (if not to advocate experiencing the work according to them), and to be

justified in so doing.

Such cases are not, of course, *all* justified. We might think that some kinds of critical decisions based on artistic influence are insidious, destructive of aesthetic appreciation. They may, for instance, bolster false reputations. But *some* critical decisions of this sort may be acceptable, for they may rely on the critic's sense of being in the presence of a new artistic movement, united by certain aims and sensibilities which, due to their widespread influence, inform what *makes* certain interpretations value-maximizing.<sup>20</sup> Such are the times when, for instance, conventions are sidelined. A standard intentionalist is likely to view such times as a critic's fulfilling his function of attending to the artist as such. I am more inclined to view them as a critic's being motivated by an underlying commitment to value-maximization. The merit of my position lies, I believe, in its having a plausible explanation not only of when it is proper, but also of when *improper*, for a critic to bestow such attention on an artist. For if such attention were justified by its being an *aim* of interpretation to get the artist right, then it would *always* seem to be justified (for there is always an artist demanding to be got right). But if such attention were justified largely by *value-considerations*, then there would be (as there in fact are) many occasions on which the demands of an artist to be got right must (to whatever extent) be sidelined, for instance when the artist's aims and ambitions have no bearing on what maximizes the value of the work.

An ideal instance of the sort of case I am imagining would go as follows. An artist has certain ideas about what she wants a certain pending artwork to be like, what she wants it to mean. These ideas happen to be popularly disseminated through her having given interviews or written articles (or perhaps they are popular in the context of her earlier work). She creates and then issues this new artwork, and critics are tasked with writing about it. One such critic might begin by doing (what many would regard as) his due diligence in researching the artist and her ideas, recognizing their popularity and possible adoption by other artists, both present and future. He might further recognize that

20. An example may be the Dogme 95 movement in Danish film, which publicized its artistic ambitions in a "manifesto" that came to serve as the lens through which all member films were viewed. See Badley (2006).

experiencing (what he takes to be) a relevant sweep of works in terms (partly) of her ideas maximizes their value, i.e. that consumers of these works would get the most value out of them by so experiencing them (and perhaps also that cultivating such a mode of experience would be useful). He then composes his criticism with the aim of expressing this complicated interrelation of facts, about value and what realizes it in this work in the context of the relevant broad sweep of other works. To do this, he has to bring in the artist's ideas as such, and to make his recommendation (partly) in terms of them.

In this imagined scenario, it is not merely the artist's having the ideas (or intentions) that makes them critically relevant, but, in addition, the intellectual relationships in which she thereby enters with other artists and with segments of culture more generally. At the same time, this alleged critical relevance of her ideas is not insensitive to the fact that they are *her ideas*. If she had not had them, they would not (in relevant alternatives) achieve the prominence that they did, and so the meanings to which they led might no longer be value-maximizing (if certain ways of experiencing would not have been in common currency). So there is something of a symbiosis in such cases. A meaning's attribute of value-maximizing, which by definition secures its critical relevance, depends on the artist's influence, which by association makes this influence critically relevant. Such intended meanings do not merely happen to be value-maximizing, but are so partly in virtue of their being intended.

It may, however, be objected, as above, that I have not quite vindicated the claim that intentions *as such* are critically relevant. For does not this account track only the *publicization* of the intention, not the intention itself, so that anything so publicized, whether really intended or not, would wield the relevant influence and so yield the relevant value-maximization? I cannot, that is, exclude alternatives in which all else is the same except that the artist did not really intend the thing for which she is regarded as influential. In such alternatives, the critic would still be licensed to interpret the work as he does in the actual case. Hence, he is not tracking the actual intention (at best something like the *intention-as-publicized*).

As before, I concede the basic point, but understand its consequences differently. First, I take myself to be offering an account of critical principles

that delivers a sense of critical *relevance*, rather than (directly) *criteria* for correct or acceptable interpretations (which is what many contributors to the debate have chosen to focus on). It is possible for there to be occasions on which a critic following sound critical principles, which ensure the critical relevance of his discourse, is nevertheless led astray due to contingencies which he could not reasonably have foreseen, e.g. that the artist has lied about her intentions but the lies have been influential enough to affect what would maximize the value of her work. I say this not merely in acknowledgement of an epistemic difficulty, for the objector's point is that even if the critic came to know of the lies as such, he would still be justified in reporting only the subject of influence, not whatever may have been the true but unknown intention. This leads me to my second point.

I again believe it to be a virtue of my view that it only *contingently* brings intentions into its orbit: if an intention is hooked up to the channels of cultural influence in the right sort of way, then it will enjoy attention to some extent *as such*, given that it could have maintained its influence even with a different content (or, perhaps more accurately, that a different intention in its place could have done so). One of my objections against standard varieties of intentionalism has been that they risk making *the work* contingent for the sake of having something to say about the relevance of intentions. Although the alternative of saying that intentions are *irrelevant* is equally to be avoided, it is not to be avoided by making the discovery of intentions an *aim* of interpretation. The critic must at all times be oriented toward the work.

Third, I stress that this influence-based account is but one manifestation of the more general phenomenon that I have called, for lack of a better term, a “symbiosis” between value-considerations and biographical information. I happen to find artistic influence a reasonably good explainer of certain kinds of justified critical attention to facts about the artist—even if it is merely *expected* influence in the case of new or unknown artists (or of newly discovered documents pertaining to established artists).<sup>21</sup> But there may be other manifestations

21. The relevance of “expected” influence is consistent with some views about the kinds of statements critics make. For instance, Stecker argues that sometimes critical statements take the form of “prescriptions or suggestions” (1991, 244). This is true, in my case, both in the

of the symbiosis, so long as facts about an artist are influencing everyday ways of experiencing which are then recruited for the experience of art. Think of, say, the iconography of Hitchcock's profile, or the voice of Orson Welles, each of which is critically relevant if it enters into the reasons why some interpretation of a work is value-maximizing. This, moreover, is a way in which the intentionalism debate can be opened up to all biographical information, for on such an account there is no difference in principle between the influence of intentions and the influence of other facts about an artist.

Let me now illustrate some of my claims in this chapter, in particular how they may fit into an overall value-maximizing view, by means of an extended example.

### 3.3 *Wood and Plan 9*

A much talked about example in the literature is the film *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1957), directed by Ed Wood. The dispute has turned on how facts about Wood should make themselves felt in what we deem acceptable interpretations of the film. I will disagree with the standard intentionalist treatment of the example, represented in Carroll (1992). But I will also go beyond the standard response of the value-maximizer, represented in Goldman (1995). In particular, I will be describing a kind of justifiable critical attention to Wood's biography that appeals to, rather than contradicts, the demands of value-maximization.

Carroll provides a description of the film which we can treat as a starting point:

*Plan 9 from Outer Space* is a cheap, slapdash attempt to make a feature film for very little, and in cutting corners to save money it violates—in outlandish ways—many of the decorums of Hollywood filmmaking that later avant-gardists also seek to affront.... Given the venue Wood trafficked in, it seems that the best hypothesis about

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sense that critics make recommendations as to experience, and in the sense that sometimes they act *as if* certain of the artist's beliefs and ambitions had the relevant influence (expecting that they would, or believing that they should, when properly publicized).

his intentions is that he was attempting to imitate the Hollywood style of filmmaking in the cheapest way possible. (1992, 119–120)

Since Wood's intention was to "imitate the Hollywood style of filmmaking," Carroll believes that we must interpret the film according to this style—to which I will hereafter refer as "Classical style."<sup>22</sup> So, for example, the film's "narrative discontinuities and editing howlers" should be interpreted as just that, discontinuities and howlers, failures to conform to Classical style.

The value-maximizer is said to propose an alternative. She, like Carroll, notices that certain avant-garde films include features very similar to those of Wood's film: "disturbances of continuity editing, disorienting narrative ellipses, or disruptions of eyeline matches." She also follows Carroll in holding that the right way to interpret such features in the case of the avant-garde films is as "subversions of a dominant and ideologically suspect form of filmmaking." But she is then said to propose that Wood's films, too, be so experienced—not as blunders and mistakes, which makes them less satisfying, but as subversions. That so experiencing them would make them more satisfying provides not only practical grounds for doing so (for who does not want satisfying experiences?), but *critical* grounds. The maximization of value is said to be what makes this the *right* way to experience Wood's films.

Carroll objects by denying that canonical interpretations of the relevant avant-garde films are to be explained in terms of value-maximization. It is not because such interpretations make for satisfying experiences that they are favoured, he says, but because of the artist's intentions. The avant-garde filmmakers *intended* their features as transgressions, such that, "given the historical evolution of the language game in which avant-garde filmmaking is practiced, the attribution of such meanings to [these] films is warranted ... on intentionalist grounds" (119). Since Wood's intentions are different—indeed, they had to have been, adds Carroll, because the relevant avant-garde practices were not "available" to Wood<sup>23</sup>—we are not under any pressure to interpret his films in

22. See Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson (1985) for a canonical explication of this style.

23. I am not sure what it is appropriate to say Wood had "available" to him, but the claim cannot be merely about "later avant-garde," for there have been transgressions of Classical style as long as there has been such a style. I will therefore use the term "avant-garde" rather



the same way as we do the avant-garde films. The comparison does not hold up.

Actual value-maximizers are likely to deny that they are committed to the alternative Carroll describes. One way they could do this is by denying that so interpreting Wood's films is in fact value-maximizing. Goldman makes such a reply:

The deeper question here is whether the experience of this work really would be better if we thought that the disconcerting techniques were intentional affronts to the film establishment.... [T]o think that all deviations from established methods, even when they are intentional, indicate positive values, is to place too high a value on mere originality.... [I]n this case I doubt that interpreting as intentional deviations features of a film that appear to be mistakes precisely because they make the experience of it so unsatisfying would make that experience any better. (1995, 114)

As I understand Carroll, however, he is not accusing the value-maximizer of placing too high a value on originality (or on any other such thing). His accusation is rather that the value-maximizer is forced to assimilate Wood's films to those of a superficially similar avant-garde, whatever may be the value-maximal interpretation appropriate to the latter. Goldman suggests that not "all deviations from established methods ... indicate positive values," but he must have *some* account of value-maximal interpretations of avant-garde films, even if their value is not due merely to their deviations from established methods. His account will presumably advert to interpretations that are responsive to certain *other*, more complex values (those to which canonical interpretations of avant-garde films advert). But then the question is how he can withhold the latter interpretations from Wood's films, given that, in virtue of the (alleged) similarity of features, *Wood's* films, too, would be benefited by such interpretations. In other words, the value-maximizer cannot justify a differential critical

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loosely, as applying to pretty much any film which systematically indulges in what Carroll calls "transgression" of Classical style. This would include the works of certain Japanese filmmakers in the 1930s (e.g. Naruse) no less than those of certain French filmmakers of the 1960s (e.g. Godard, whom Carroll mentions).

treatment of the avant-garde films and Wood's films. Goldman does not offer any reasons in support of such differential treatment. Carroll's reason invokes artistic intentions: the avant-gardist, unlike Wood, intended her deviations, so that only former's work is to be read as "transgressive."<sup>24</sup>

Intuitions may vary here, but mine dictate that we should not seek too strenuously to make such a differentiation. There will, of course, be an undeniable *historical* difference in who the relevant artists are, when they are practising their art, under which conditions, and so on. Wood was an independent filmmaker who had few ties to any sort of industry. The avant-gardists Carroll seems to be imagining are more organized, have coherent ideological goals, and are working from different traditions than was Wood. These are all facts about which it is worthwhile to educate oneself as a consumer of art (especially of these artworks). But it is a separate and further question how one should *interpret* these works. To the extent that the function of interpretation is to facilitate satisfying aesthetic experience, and (let us suppose) it is satisfying to experience Wood's films somewhat in the way certain avant-garde films are satisfyingly experienced, it does indeed seem legitimate for a critic to encourage consumers to so experience Wood's films. The value-maximizer need not shrink from this consequence.

However, it is unclear whether assimilating the experience of Wood's films to that of certain avant-garde films *would* be satisfying. Goldman doubts the value of mere "deviations from established methods." What he may mean is that the sort of deviations one finds in avant-garde films—the good ones, at any rate—are simply more sophisticated, more conducive to valuable experience, than are the chaotic deviations one finds in Wood's films. In particular, the former are easier to see as *adding up to something*. It may thus be more worthwhile to get oneself to experience them as "subversions," given the consistency one will find across a range of such works, having cultivated such habits of experience. Meanwhile, it is not clear that even if one gets oneself in a position to satisfyingly

24. This also obviates replies such as that made by Dickie (2006), which deny that "transgression" is an aesthetically relevant property. For the issue is not about what specifically is valuable about avant-garde films but how the relevant features of Wood's films are not to be deemed similarly valuable. Carroll's objection may thus be viewed as a variant of objections from cases of indiscernibles.

experience one of Wood's films as "subversive," it will have much bearing on others of Wood's films (let alone wider ranges of art), if nothing consistently unites these films in the nature of their respective "subversions."

Now, it so happens, I think, that Wood's films *are* to some extent so unified, but the ways in which *their* "subversions" may satisfyingly be experienced differ from those in which the "subversions" of the relevant avant-garde films may be. This is sufficient for the value-maximizer as far as differentiation of critical treatment is concerned (between Wood's films and the relevant avant-garde films). But it also acknowledges that there will be some overlap. A critic writing in an environment in which a significant avant-garde movement is thriving should be seen as unperceptive if he completely ignores this movement in his discussion of films which could satisfyingly be experienced in the light of that movement. This does not, of course, require deluding oneself as to Wood's intentions. It is probably true that Wood had no avant-garde intentions, that his deviations from Classical style are mere inept bumbling. But if his product bears interesting similarities to other sorts of films, such that cultivated habits of experiencing the latter could be retroactively applied, it would seem to be incumbent on a practice whose aim is to guide consumers to aesthetic satisfaction to avail itself of such possibilities. Carroll is correct to identify this as a commitment of value-maximization, but he overestimates its harm.

Let me demonstrate this by looking at an actual critic he accuses of perpetrating the harm: J. Hoberman, who follows something of the logic of a value-maximizer. The fact that Hoberman's article (the one which Carroll cites) is entitled "Bad Movies" (1980) should tip us off that we are in for something more complex than blind praise. Carroll says that Hoberman "began to project [avant-garde] readings backward," but this cannot quite be true, for Hoberman did not view avant-garde films as "bad."<sup>25</sup>

Hoberman calls the category in which he places Wood's films "objectively bad films," and begins by outlining some reasons to be interested in it. First, that "tastes change; that many, if not most, of the films we admire were once dismissed as inconsequential trash; and that trash itself is not without certain

25. See Hoberman (1981).

socio-aesthetic charms.” Second, that “bad movies have a pedagogic use value—the evolution of film form has largely been based upon mistakes.” Third, that

movies, to a certain degree, have a life of their own.<sup>26</sup> They mix the documentary with the fictional, and the worst [inadvertencies]<sup>27</sup> of one can easily overwhelm the best intentions of the other. That is, it is possible for a movie to succeed *because* it has failed. (7)

Each of Hoberman’s reasons is important to consider. The first points out the critic’s responsibility to changing tastes: how she talks about works ought to be sensitive to the environment in which she is talking about them, to the consumers she takes herself to be addressing. The second reason ventures a sort of connection between the mistakes of yesterday and the avant-garde of today. While I don’t think it is quite plausible to view Wood as some sort of precursor to a future avant-garde, it is not unlikely that his efforts were appreciated by subsequent filmmakers whose own efforts we are inclined to see in a better light. (I say more about this below.) The third reason most informs Hoberman’s approach to Wood’s films, which he treats as open possibilities for valuable experience. That he will not in the process distort them is suggested by his resting his case on their *failure*.<sup>28</sup>

Hoberman defines objectively bad films as those which are “so incoherent that *they unmade themselves*”:

The conventional narrative film ... asks an indulgent acceptance of its own diegetic, or fictive, space. The badly-made unconvincing film confounds this minimal requirement by ignoring or (more often) bungling the most rudimentary precepts of screen naturalism. (1980, 8)

26. Compare with Beardsley (1970): “The literary text ... has a will, or at least a way, of its own. The sense it makes—along with the sound it makes—is what it offers for our aesthetic contemplation” (37).

27. This is a correction from a reprint (1991, 13).

28. The genre to which he is thus gesturing is *camp*, in particular what Susan Sontag (1967) calls “naïve” or “pure” camp, the value of which lies in something quite other than what the artist sincerely intended. Although there are clear affinities between naïve camp and Hoberman’s category of the objectively bad film, the latter is specifically tailored to Wood’s oeuvre (among others).

It is in a blatant sort of unconvincingness that the value of the objectively bad film is said to reside. Its failed “phoniness,” an “often poignant, heightened realism induced by ... a failure to convince,” is “more authentic ... than the naturalism achieved by *successfully* phony” films (viz. those which are exemplary of Classical style). “Poor acting and ludicrous dialogue” are not enough, for many ordinarily bad or sub-par films have such features. An objectively bad film “must relentlessly draw one’s attention away from its absurd plot.”

So much Carroll might accept, that there is such a category of film. What draws his ire, however, is that Hoberman veers toward the characteristics of the avant-garde, as when Hoberman takes objectively bad films to “acknowledge” the view that “the seamless ‘equipment-free aspect of reality’ that movies presented on screen was actually the ‘height of artifice’” (8). In these films, Hoberman says, “the lie of ‘chronology’ is confounded by imperfect continuity; ‘invisible’ editing is ruptured by mismatched cuts; *mise en scène* is foregrounded by cloddish bits of business.” Carroll would deny that the listed features do the mentioned things, for the artists of objectively bad films do not have intentions to this effect.

Hoberman is admittedly walking a thin line here. He wants to praise certain aspects of objectively bad films in terms similar to those in which avant-garde films are praised, without quite assimilating the former to the latter. He says, immediately following the lines I have just quoted, that “[a] good bad movie is a philosophers’ stone that converts the incompetent mistakes of naïve dross into modernist gold.” This, again, is precisely what irritates Carroll, for, to his mind, incompetent mistakes *just are not* modernist gold. For Hoberman, however, “[s]uch movies are unstable objects,” and their value lies in their instability.

By the time of Hoberman’s writing, there were certain established modes of experience thought to pertain to films which “transgressed” the boundaries of Classical style. *Revel in the transgression*, the critic would say, *enjoy the delirium of breaks in the façade!* Stilted acting, odd changes of camera angle, jarring ellipses, all of these were to be taken in stride as part of a certain overall experience. In the normal (Classical) mode, we are encouraged to pause over such elements, strain

to not be led off by them.<sup>29</sup> In the alternative mode, we allow ourselves the luxury of being so led off. Hoberman is thus drawing on *established* alternative modes of experience and *extending* them for the purpose of opening up films that, he believes, have not been milked for all that they are worth.

Such would be a way to develop the sort of reasoning Carroll attributes to the value-maximizer, and it does not seem to me all that implausible. But the value-maximizer could, again, believe, as I mention above, that the value of Wood's films is *not* enhanced by experiencing them as one does the relevant avant-garde films; that, furthermore, to maximize the values of these films in the context of any sensible wider range of works is to treat them as inferior products of Classical style. I myself don't believe this, so I will not attempt to defend it, but it is possible under my refinement of value-maximization theory, which is sensitive to the fact that consumers of works cannot adopt idiosyncratic experiential attitudes at whim. Hoberman contends that Wood's films just cannot be experienced in Classical style (so "unmade" are they). This may well be the case. But it may equally be that they cannot be experienced in the "avant-garde" mode either, in which case, if a critic nevertheless wishes to make something of them, some other set of recommendations as to experience must be found. My own view is that the sort of value-maximization account I have just rehearsed, using Hoberman, is more or less correct. This does not, however, exclude the critical relevance of Wood's biography, as I will next attempt to show.

### 3.3.1 *Wood's Biography*

Let me say, first of all, that, regardless of what we think about this case, it is not incumbent on the metacritic to *always* provide for such a relevance of the artist. Often enough, works may be interpreted and evaluated in the absence of any serious attention to the artist's biography. I believe this maps reasonably well

29. Of course, in one sense we should *not* pause over them, should set them aside as mistakes that are not to be assimilated into our experience of the film (its diegetic reality). But even to do this much one must *mark them off as such*, for if they are unreflectively assimilated then one will be forced to make odd and irrelevant presuppositions (on the fly, as it were). For example, a continuity error, if noticed, needs to be paused over and bracketed, rather than simply taken in stride.

onto the practice of critics, which does not always bestow such attention. The theoretical task is to adequately account for the kinds of attention to the artist one *does* find, while also maintaining some sort of normative or prescriptive standard that rules some of it critically irrelevant (notwithstanding any given critic's beliefs to the contrary).

In the case of Wood's films, it seems to me that critics will have more opportunity than is normally the case to focus on "meaning-determining" intentions, and far less than is normally the case to focus on "meaning-tracking" intentions. For Wood has had, I will argue, a certain cultural influence that has affected what makes certain interpretations of his films value-maximizing, even though it is not clear that very many of his intentions "tracked" the meanings attributed by such interpretations. Consequently, the sort of critical attention I will attempt to explain concerns biographical facts (not necessarily intentions) that I will say are "meaning-determining."

The demands on a critic of Wood's films to mention the man himself, his biography and intentions, are different today than they were during Wood's lifetime. Some background history is required to appreciate this. Consider, first, the fact that the year of Hoberman's article there also appeared an influential, tongue-in-cheek book by the Medved brothers entitled *The Golden Turkey Awards*, a compendium of "bad" films in which Wood is awarded the (dis)honourable title of "Worst Director of All Time," and *Plan 9* "Worst Film of All Time." This development had a remarkable effect on Wood's reputation. As one recent critic, Rob Craig, describes it,

[w]hat many film buffs took from the Medved books, again underscoring their overall contribution to popular culture, was a curiosity towards the filmmakers and films discussed.... If their object was to scare people away from [*Plan 9*] by claiming it "the worst film of all time" (which seems doubtful), the Medveds failed in this task, for the obvious effect of glorifying the film was thus to make it a highly sought after, increasingly popular cult film attraction ... (2009, 138-139)

Craig goes on to offer an interpretation of *Plan 9* along the lines of what I

have already discussed, e.g. that it has certain “shocking” elements: “abstract, ‘symbolic’ special effects; shameless, incongruous clowning on the part of several characters; a treasure trove of nonsense verbiage.” Like Hoberman, he does not want to

suggest that Wood was consciously trying to create a dramatic shock-piece along the lines of a Samuel Beckett or Eugene Ionesco, only that it is peculiar and intriguing that some of the most striking and unique elements of post-modern Absurdist drama managed to find their way into *Plan 9*, either by accident or intuitive foresight on the part of its author. (141)

Let us set aside the possibility of “intuitive foresight” (though it is not entirely implausible). So far we have an interpretation roughly like Hoberman’s. Craig, however, goes on to pepper his with facts about Wood, such as that Wood had an “obsession” with “all things religious and metaphysical,” on which fact Craig draws for his interpretive claim that *Plan 9* “looks like a religious drama.” He bolsters this claim by mentioning that “*Plan 9* was primarily produced by transplanted Southern Baptists, who also played several key parts in the film, and in addition insisted that the performers be baptized before production commenced” (142). We are here clearly entering the territory of a more traditional sort of interpretation (if concerning some peculiar facts), and one therefore wonders what exactly is the basis of Craig’s *critical* interest in Wood’s biography.

He mentions that he is relying mainly on two prominent sources for historical details, a documentary, *Flying Saucers Over Hollywood—The Plan 9 Companion* (1991), and a biography by Rudolph Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy: The Life and Art of Edward D. Wood* (1992). What is interesting to me is that people found it worthwhile to create such documentaries and to research and write such biographies. Surely there was no such interest at the time Wood was making his films, and arguably very little even when Hoberman wrote his article. The interest seems to have picked up after the book by the Medveds, and to have been cemented around the time Carroll was writing in 1992. Since then we have been living in the aftermath of a cemented such interest in Wood and



his films. Craig, writing in 2009, is sensitive to this aftermath. I mention all this because I propose to analyze (some of) Craig's critical interest in Wood in terms of the latter's now much larger influence.

Wood has garnered a reputation for making bad films that offer aesthetically enjoyable experiences if approached a certain way. This has generated *historical* interest in the life and times of a man who could be capable of making such films, which presumably are difficult to make even if one tries. Wood appears to have done it without trying—that is to say, without trying to offer *precisely* such rewards. Clearly he was trying to do something, and those interested in the latter rewards may believe it to be worthwhile to inquire into what Wood *was* trying to do. When such facts about him become widely known, and when artists begin to inquire after them and to incorporate into their art-making the fruits of their inquiries, then this bit of art history has gathered steam of its own accord, so to speak, and managed to dictate valuable ways of experiencing. Such is, I contend, one sort of critical relevance of Wood's aims and ambitions.

I have already outlined how the first part of this narrative unfolded, bringing Wood and his films to a sort of cultural prominence. The second part, involving artists being influenced by Wood, may be seen best in the example of the director Tim Burton. His interest in Wood is on display in his 1994 biopic, *Ed Wood* (the screenplay for which, incidentally, is based on the Grey biography I mention above). While it is true that a director may make a biopic about some figure whose artistic intentions he is not influenced by, such is not the case with Burton and Wood. Although Burton's output is more diverse, and securely in the domain of Classical style, it may be regarded as similar to Wood's in certain respects. It is, for instance,

filled with imagery that is morbid or grotesque. He spends vast amounts of money creating films within genres that are either past their sell-by date or reserved for the straight-to-video market. He has produced a body of work that focuses on the outcasts of society. His villains are rarely resolutely evil—they're normally misunderstood. Traditional narrative techniques exist in his films, but are secondary to image and feeling. In some senses his output is belittled by mere description—a film about a man who has scissors

instead of hands may sound trite but needs to be felt. (Odell and Blanc 2005, 11)

It may be a stretch to say that Burton consciously replicates Wood's unconscious output, but clearly he has absorbed a certain aesthetic that, in much of its original realization, was not designed to reward the kind of attention that he, now, consciously seeks.<sup>30</sup>

In order to so harness this aesthetic, Burton needed to examine the mechanics of its original realization, part of which involved looking at what Wood (as one of these influences) was trying to do. There is indeed evidence of Burton's having done this. Aside from having already been a fan of Wood,<sup>31</sup> he also researched him in preparation for making the biopic:

"When I read Ed Wood's letters, I was very taken with how he perceived himself," Tim Burton says. "He wrote about his films as if he was making *Citizen Kane*, you know, whereas other people perceived them as, like, the worst movies ever. In American culture it's so easy to make fun of people. But, however good or bad Ed Wood's films were, the fact is that he did what he did with a passion that is lacking in a lot of people in America." (Dwyer 1994)

Part of a critic's interest in Wood's biography may thus be an interest in his passions, and to the extent that directors such as Tim Burton are themselves interested in Wood's passions, so far as to be influenced by them, a critic's interest in these same passions may be justified on value-maximizing grounds, in the manner I propose above. For what makes it the case that the mode of

30. Burton also accomplishes some of what Wood tried *unsuccessfully* to accomplish in Classical style. There are demonstrations of this in *Ed Wood*, in which certain re-creations of scenes from Wood's films are interestingly related to depicted events from Wood's life, the latter effectively conveying, among other things, the pathos for which Wood clearly strove.

31. Burton says that he "grew up loving *Plan 9*, which is a movie you see when you're a kid and it remains with you. And then later on, Wood gets acknowledged as the worst director in the world, and then starts to get a little bit more known, and then there are festivals, and they show his movies and everybody laughs at them. But the thing is, when you watch his movies, yeah, they are bad, but they're special. There's some reason why these movies remain there, and are acknowledged, beyond the fact that they're purely bad. There's a certain consistency to them, and a certain kind of weird artistry" (1995, 130-131).

experience which now maximizes the value of Wood's films is in common currency is partly that Wood's aims and ambitions (his "passions") had a certain influence on the culture and on what subsequent art looked like (e.g. in and through Burton's *Ed Wood*). Knowing that Wood was "passionate" came to affect what modes of experience were deemed appropriate, not just for Wood's films but for films such as his, as he enjoyed greater and greater notoriety.

A critic writing about Wood's films today may include some of Burton's in the relevant broad sweep of artworks. This would lead him to certain meanings, or recommendations as to experience, that would, if not quite correspond with, at least be sensitive to what Wood was trying to do. A recognition of the influence of Wood's ambitions and methods would, that is, give the critic a reason to talk about Wood (in addition, perhaps, to talking about Burton, who has had his own influence). This does not quite vindicate, for instance, Craig's invocation of Wood's religious intentions, unless some such network of influence could be established for these (or shown to be assumed by Craig).<sup>32</sup> But it may justify a great deal of talk about those of Wood's biographical details which are held to have been influential.

Such a way of accounting for the critical relevance of biographical information has an advantage that is especially visible in the present case. It explains why it would not have seemed appropriate for Hoberman, writing in 1980, to launch into details of Wood's biography, while it does seem appropriate for Craig, writing in 2009, to have done this. There are interlocking intuitions here. If Hoberman had even been *able* to discuss the details of Wood's biography then perhaps his having had access to them would have indicated a standing cultural interest in Wood that may itself have rendered a biographical interest *prima facie* critically relevant. This is because such cultural facts are related to what would be value-maximizing for members of that culture, what modes of experience are in common currency.

It seems to me that such an account can also help explain certain lingering intuitions about why it is important for biographical information to be *public*,

32. It may be significant that the production history I have quoted Craig as mentioning is dramatized in *Ed Wood*. One might also, I suppose, try to explain such of Craig's claims as being sensitive to Wood's (however limited) "meaning-tracking" intentions.

rather than *private*. This, on my account, would not be some metaphysical status but a social one, of *publicization*. It has been difficult to theoretically motivate the relevance of such a status, many contributors to the debate finding it arbitrary (Carroll 2001). But the reason I provide makes it relevant in terms of relations of influence, for which *some* publicization is necessary. Private diaries, read by nobody, cannot be influential.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Intentions and Evaluation*

[C]ritics who ask not ‘what is it like to be reading this’ but ‘what does this mean’ ... customarily have in mind something like the content usually and properly associated with non-dramatic discourse, philosophy, or sociological psychology ... [but] it is necessary to stress that in dramatic literature the primary concern of literary criticism is the *way* we apprehend the meaning, our experience of it rather than the meaning itself, abstractly considered.

– Richard Poirier<sup>1</sup>

I introduced in the previous chapter the rudiments of a metacritical intentionalism that supervenes on value-maximization theory. It may be wondered what is the significance of the latter choice, why some other theory of meaning could not suffice. One advantage, to be explored in this chapter, is that it gives intentionalists something to say about the relation between intentions and evaluation, a subject about which they have been conspicuously silent. Intentionalists might wish so to remain, but anti-intentionalists have exerted certain pressures to break them out of their silence. I describe such pressures in the first part of the chapter and make a case for their force. In the second part, I consider some ways intentionalists have tried to relieve the pressure, and argue that none of them are entirely satisfactory. In the final part, I outline how a metacritical variety of intentionalism may lead to a better solution.

1. *The Comic Sense of Henry James: A Study of the Early Novels*. (1960) 1967. Revised ed. Chatto & Windus, 62–63.

#### 4.1 *The Value-Sensitivity Objection*

Beardsley and Wimsatt's stated thesis is that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (1946, 468). This appears to speak only to evaluation—"the success of a work"—yet much of what Beardsley and Wimsatt go on to argue involves both evaluation *and* interpretation. Even though they disambiguate the two terms in subsequent writings, it is still not clear to which they give priority. Peckham (1976) claims that "their argument amounts to the proposition that intention is irrelevant to evaluation because it is irrelevant to interpretation" (141). This may be true, but they could also have argued the reverse, that intention is irrelevant to interpretation because it is irrelevant to evaluation. Such, at least, in outline, is the objection I will consider here.

Gaut (1993) offers a nascent version of the objection, useful to discuss as relevant background. He seizes on what he describes as intentionalism's commitment to "the interpretation/evaluation dichotomy: this claims that interpretation is independent of evaluation, and that, consequently, accounts of interpretation and evaluation are independent of each other." Such a commitment is said to be

fortunate for the intentionalist since, when applied to evaluation, intentionalism is obviously false. The fact that an artist intends to produce a great work of art is neither necessary nor sufficient for her to make such a work. Such an intention indicates her ambition, but does not measure her achievement. (498)

By "dichotomy," Gaut means not merely a *distinction* between the dichotomized things but a claim of their *theoretical independence*, in particular the claim that one may theorize interpretation independently of evaluation. It seems possible to deny such an independence claim (as I will call it) without denying that there is some sort of distinction between interpretation and evaluation—indeed, some sort of "dichotomy." Gaut's arguments against what he calls "the dichotomy paradigm" need to be understood in this light: he is not arguing that there is no distinction between interpretation and evaluation, only that the former cannot be theorized in isolation from the latter.

One question we may have is whether Gaut is correct that intentionalists are committed to this independence claim. I am inclined to agree with him at least to the extent that intentionalists tend to elide the subject of evaluation when giving their intentionalist views. Of course, intentionalists will often, *qua* philosophers of art, have views about evaluation, but these need not be, and indeed never are, *intentionalist* views. This is how intentionalists, to Gaut's mind, treat interpretation and evaluation as theoretically independent. They offer an intentionalist view of interpretation, and something else entirely in the case of evaluation.

But how prevalent is this? Gaut gives the example of Richard Wollheim's *Art and Its Objects* and *Painting as an Art*, noting that these works have "almost nothing to say" about evaluation. Wollheim does, it bears mentioning (and Gaut mentions it in a footnote), have a short supplementary essay on evaluation in the second edition of *Art and Its Objects*, the first lines of which essay contain an admission that "the topic of the evaluation of art" was a "deliberate omission" from the main text (1980a, 227). But Wollheim's ideas about evaluation in this essay do not continue, or in any way connect with, his intentionalist theory of interpretation, which he details in another supplementary essay ("Criticism as Retrieval") and later in *Painting as an Art*. This is a striking example for Gaut, because Wollheim is a prominent figure in the intentionalism debate, one whose lead many contemporary intentionalists follow.

It is important to see, however, that Gaut's point is not merely such a sociological one, simply that intentionalists have *tended* to theorize interpretation independently of evaluation. It is instead a conceptual point about intentionalism itself: intentionalists are said to be wise to stay away from intentionalist views of evaluation because there is supposed to be something *essential* to intentionalism that just does not apply to evaluation, and intentionalists tacitly pick up on it even if they do not explicitly acknowledge it.

I will raise objections to this conceptual claim later, drawing on the meta-critical view I introduced in the previous chapter. But first I want to join Gaut in arguing against the independence claim. For I agree with him that interpretation cannot, nor should we desire it to, be theorized independently of evaluation.

#### 4.1.1 *The Evaluative Stance*

One of Gaut's arguments against the independence claim is based on what he calls "the evaluative stance." He claims that in seeking out artworks one is looking

for a valuable experience, and what one values includes not just pleasure, but also encompasses cognitive insight, experience of emotional depth, etc. Nevertheless, it is true that one takes an evaluative stance in reading, for one's concerns are not purely (non-evaluatively) cognitive: one does not *research* novels, one *appreciates* them. This evaluative stance manifests itself at the level of interpretation too. One criterion for a new interpretation being an improvement over others is that, on the proffered interpretation, one can see a work that before seemed boring, inane and lacking in coherence as lively, profound and vital. (1993, 599)

Gaut thus concludes that "[t]he revelation of value counts towards the correctness of interpretation," not as the "sole criterion" but as "*one* criterion."

All of this strikes me as very similar to the Aesthetic Argument (covered in the previous chapter). The first premise of such an argument is a function-of-art claim that identifies this function as that of affording aesthetic satisfaction. So Gaut says that in seeking out artworks one is looking for valuable experience. The second premise is a claim about the dependence of the function of interpretation on the function of art, i.e. that, as Carroll puts it, interpretation is an "adjunct to artistic consumption." So Gaut says that the evaluative stance "manifests itself at the level of interpretation." He doesn't say why, or give any reasons for thinking this, but clearly he has in mind some such idea as interpretation's being an adjunct to experience. The conclusions of the two arguments are also roughly the same. Both for Gaut and for the Aesthetic Argument, it is that value-considerations are criterial for correct interpretation.

I take what Gaut says here to bring out a latent commitment of the Aesthetic Argument. This is that, by defining interpretation in such a way, as a practice of value-maximizing, one gets not only a conception of interpretation but an overall conception of criticism in which evaluative concerns are



given priority. Criticism is undertaken with an “evaluative stance.” A problem with Gaut’s argument, however, is that it arrives at this more general claim by *presupposing* value-maximization theory (via something like the Aesthetic Argument). Although I agree with much of what he says, it will be more useful for my purposes to characterize this stance somewhat independently of any overt value-maximization theory. Someone who does this to my satisfaction is Peter Lamarque (2002). I therefore articulate the objection in which I am interested in terms of (what I take to be) his characterization of the evaluative stance.

Lamarque argues that a lot of people have mistaken ideas about what literary<sup>2</sup> interpretation really is. He begins his discussion by co-opting a three-part distinction of Beardsley’s (1958), between “explication,” “elucidation,” and “interpretation”:

For Beardsley, to *explicate* is “to determine the contextual meanings of a group of words”; to *elucidate* is “to determine parts of the world of the work, such as character and motives, that are not explicitly reported in it”; and to *interpret* is “to determine the themes and theses of a literary work, given the contextual meanings of the words and a complete description of the world of the work.” (Lamarque 2002, 291)

Let us call the last category interpretation\*, to differentiate it from the more ordinary notion that is often taken to encompass all three activities. I leave it open whether ultimately the concept of interpretation should be restricted to interpretation\*.

The interest of this division concerns method. As Beardsley notes, “the three processes of understanding literature are different enough in method to demand different names” (1958, 403). Lamarque seems to concur. About explication, he observes that it “most readily lends itself to the appropriation of models of meaning from outside literary practice,” such as “conversation” and “utterance meaning” (2002, 291). With respect to elucidation, he voices his dissatisfaction, in league with Kendall Walton, with popular means of

2. He restricts his attention to literary works, but my focus is more expansive.

adjudication like “the Reality Principle” and the “Mutual Belief Principle” (295). And about interpretation\* he argues, concerning themes, that their “elicitation as an organizing principle of the work demands, and is a product of, a kind of imaginative reconstruction on the part of a reader” (298).

Proposals of such restrictions on the label “interpretation” are commonly made on epistemic grounds, e.g. regarding the puzzling aspects of that which is interpreted (Barnes 1988). Lamarque speaks in this way sometimes, arguing that a conversational activity is properly called interpretation only when communication “breaks down” or when words are taken not to be “honestly or straightforwardly spoken.” But his real reason for so restricting the label appeals to *evaluative* grounds, for he thinks that interpretation\* has “less to do with *meaning* as such, or with *understanding*, than with *appreciation* of a special kind” (2002, 290). What kind? That which is “constituted by just such a reconstruction [i.e. imaginative] of the work’s underlying themes” (298).

In Lamarque’s view, explication and elucidation are “subordinate” to interpretation\*, which in turn must answer to “the work at large and, what is more important, to questions about the *interest* of the work and its *value*” (297). Each of these critical activities is goal-oriented: explication and elucidation are undertaken for the sake of supporting some interpretive\* activity, and this activity itself is undertaken for the sake of appreciating the work in some respect. There are certain values a work has, and certain reasons why we may be interested in it. We interpret\* the work for these reasons, and for the appreciation of these values.

Imaginative reconstruction fits in as follows. The immediate objects of interpretation\* are, as I say above, what Lamarque calls themes:

Literary themes, which serve to exhibit a work’s unity, are identifiable with more or less specificity: as abstract concepts (pride, despair, jealousy, ambition), as noun phrases (the futility of war, the conflict between desire and duty), as propositions (fate disrupts the best-laid plans), or in other forms besides.... Standardly, the focus of interest at the thematic level rests not in the bare statement of a theme but in the manner in which the theme is elicited and supported through interpretation[\*]. (297–98)

So our interest in the work (at least one prominent sort of interest) concerns the work's themes, and this interest is satisfied by our eliciting and supporting such themes through interpretation\*. The reason why we need a distinct such process, interpretation\*, beyond merely explication and elucidation, is that themes are not, like "semantic meaning," "properties of the linguistic *text* inherent in the language"; rather, "[t]hey 'emerge' only under imaginative reconstruction" (302). In particular, they are features which the "work possesses *under a conception*." The results of explication and elucidation on which interpretation\* draws come to be "of literary interest only relative to a certain perspective" on the work. "What is happening here," Lamarque explains, "is related to ... the assigning of 'salience'" (303).

As an example of interpretation\*, i.e. of "an imaginative exploration of a work's thematic content on the assumption of an aesthetic payoff," Lamarque mentions critic J. Hillis Miller's characterization of a "mirror motif in *Our Mutual Friend*." Miller is said to take "a certain perspective on the novel and scenes within it," under which perspective certain events are interpreted\* as "concrete revelation[s] of the way the lives of ... people are self-mirroring" (qtd. 303). Lamarque does not take "the image of the mirror, fulfilling this symbolic function" to be "an intrinsic part of the *text* (i.e., sentences) of the novel, even though the occurrences described are objectively present." Rather, the mirror motif is a function of certain (value-laden) saliences assigned by the interpreter to these "objectively present" occurrences.

Now, we might not agree with *all* of this—e.g. the distinction between "semantic meaning" and "emergent" properties—but I propose to accept Lamarque's general conception of interpretation\* as a privileged critical activity distinct from others which are more subordinate. The idea of an "evaluative stance" is represented in Lamarque's belief that this privileged activity is essentially value-sensitive, guided by value considerations.

Lamarque, however, it turns out, holds intentionalism in low esteem, relegating it to the largely unexciting task of explication:

Suppose we were to follow what I take to be a fairly widespread practice among critics and adopt a relaxed view about intention: *where intentions are available and known, make use of them; where they*

*are not, make do.* I suggest that even in the light of that attitude the most interesting questions about literature still remain: why literary works are valued, what makes them distinct from other kinds of works, what rewards are to be had from reading them, how the literary development of themes differs from their development in other modes of discourse, what basis there is for the selection of canonical works, and so forth. (300)

I disagree with the claim that all of these questions, and others like them, must remain untouched by intentionalism, and my disagreement turns on how we are to understand “making use” of intentions. Lamarque understands it as helping to explicate meaning, where the latter is construed narrowly as lexical or (what is standardly called) word-sequence meaning.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, he does not think that intentions can be of substantive use for appreciation of the kind that involves imaginative reconstruction. I believe that intentions may be of precisely such use under the intentionalist view I began describing in the previous chapter. I argue this later on. First I properly formulate the objection that is latent in what Lamarque says. To do this, I return to Gaut and the independence claim.

#### 4.1.2 *Independence and Value-Sensitivity*

So far I have given an argument (or at least provided a sketch to the effect) that criticism manifests an evaluative stance. If this is so, then no theory of interpretation can entirely forgo theorizing evaluation. So the independence claim, we can agree, is false. Gaut spends a fair amount of time on this, but little on what strikes me as the equally pressing task of demonstrating the damage that this, if true, is supposed to do to intentionalism.

In fact, I have quoted more or less all of what Gaut says on this score, which spans only a few sentences. He says that “[t]he fact that an artist intends to produce a great work of art is neither necessary nor sufficient for her to make such a work,” and that “[s]uch an intention indicates her ambition, but does not measure her achievement.” But there is a complication in Gaut’s central

3. See, e.g., Levinson (1992) for the relevant taxonomy of meaning.

claim that “*when applied to evaluation, intentionalism is obviously false*” (1993, 598, emphasis added). What does it mean to apply intentionalism to evaluation? Gaut’s idea must be that the intentions which intentionalism standardly promotes are *interpretive* intentions, those which speak to how the work is to be interpreted (such as the artist’s intention that her work mean a certain thing). But, Gaut wishes to add, to apply intentionalism to evaluation is to promote, not interpretive, but *evaluative* intentions, those which speak to how the work is to be evaluated (such as the artist’s intention that her work be great).

A consequence of the independence claim being false, Gaut seems to think, is that intentionalism cannot so split itself into an interpretive version and an evaluative version. If intentionalists promote interpretive intentions, they must perforce promote (at least some) evaluative intentions. This is because no principled theoretical distinction can be made between the relevance of interpretive intentions *as such* and the relevance of evaluative intentions *as such*. In other words, intentions cannot be deemed relevant or irrelevant *qua* interpretive or *qua* evaluative. An intentionalist cannot say the following: an intention that the work mean a certain thing is the right sort of intention to be relevant *because* it speaks to how the work is to be interpreted but an intention that the work be great is not *because* it speaks only to how the work is to be evaluated. Saying something like this, which the intentionalist may wish to do in order to disqualify apparently irrelevant intentions, presupposes the independence claim.

Let me propose an answer that may occur to a contemporary intentionalist. This is that evaluative intentions may be specified, and then deemed critically irrelevant, in terms other than as *evaluative*. In particular, an intentionalist may have principled reasons to deem them *characteristically unsuccessful*, and then to disqualify them on such grounds—not *qua* evaluative but *qua* unsuccessful. How this works will depend on the operative theory of success conditions. For instance, if (against my advice from the previous chapter) success conditions are defined in causal terms—say, that an intention is successful to the extent that it makes a non-accidental causal contribution to some aesthetic property of the work—then it might be held that greatness isn’t really the sort of property to which intentions can make the relevant causal contribution.

Although this is a possible reply, it all the more signals a disconnect between intentions and value, if evaluative intentions as a class just happen to be excluded. So it is a double-edged sword. Let it be granted, however, at least for now, that a moderate intentionalist could maintain a *de facto* distinction between an interpretive version of intentionalism and an evaluative version, even if not quite in such terms.<sup>4</sup> (I will later consider some problems with this strategy.)

I wish now to develop a slightly different and more challenging version of Gaut's objection, using Lamarque's conceptual framework. As I say above, Lamarque restricts the relevance of intentionalism to explication, because intentions, in his opinion, do not provide us with answers about the value of works or their interest. Such answers come for him chiefly through interpretation\*. This is slightly different from Gaut, who says that it is impossible for the intentionalist to restrict herself to the scenario in which interpretive intentions are relevant only to "non-evaluative" properties which in turn are relevant to evaluation. Lamarque considers a similar proposal, that intentions may be relevant to value-neutral explication which feeds into value-sensitive interpretation\*, but considers it merely *inadequate*, not impossible. Both authors object to the proposal of such a contribution from intentions, but Lamarque's way of describing it, which countenances its *possibility*, can better help us formulate what is supposed to be objectionable. (For one thing, Lamarque's objection will not be resolvable in the manner I suggest above.)

The Lamarquian objection, which I will hereafter call the *value-sensitivity objection*, is that intentionalism does not give intentions enough of a role in what is really distinctive about art, because what is really distinctive about art is ineliminably valuative and intentionalism seems to give intentions no direct role in the appreciation of a work's value and interest. The "directness" is what is key. Intentions are allowed to contribute to one's understanding of the meaning of the work, and this of course has consequences for the work's evaluation; but this is an indirect contribution.

What, then, does it mean for the contribution to be direct? One option is

4. An absolute intentionalist could avail himself of such a reply by, as I describe in the second chapter, reconceiving success conditions as conditions on one's *having* an intention, claiming in effect that artists cannot truly form the relevant evaluative intentions.

to draw on Gaut's notion of the intention itself being evaluative, i.e. having content that pertains to the work's value. But this strikes me as the wrong sort of notion. It is not the *content* of the intention that defines the directness of its relation to a work's evaluation, but the manner of its elicitation and use in criticism. Lamarque's conceptual scheme thus provides the appropriate option. We may understand the directness of a contribution to evaluation in terms of the critical method to which the contribution is made. An intention is taken to directly contribute to a work's evaluation when that intention is invoked as part of a critical method that is value-sensitive. One such method is interpretation\*, but intentions do not (so the objection goes) need to be invoked at the level of interpretation\*. Although other interpretive methods, besides interpretation\*, may be value-sensitive, the intentionalist has the burden of showing why intentions should need to be invoked for any of them. Moreover, if we add that the relevant method needs to involve not just value-sensitivity but also *imaginative reconstruction*, then interpretation\* begins to seem more and more relevant, and intentions less and less.

I find this to be quite a powerful objection, one to which intentionalists have not given the necessary attention. This is perhaps because they reject the importance accorded to evaluation, or because they are simply unconcerned with intentions making the sort of direct contribution that Lamarque would require. It may also be that the objection has never been so formulated, certainly not *as an objection*, even though most of the materials from which I have constructed it can be found in Lamarque (2002).

Stecker, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, brushes the value-maximizer aside by claiming that "intention-oriented criticism can enhance appreciation as well as any other type of criticism" (2010, 147). This, of course, is consistent with intention-oriented criticism only *indirectly* enhancing appreciation, via explication and not via interpretation\*. What is needed is an argument for why intentions should be invoked in some such process as interpretation\*. The difficulty of answering this is readily apparent: intentions are typically invoked simply to tell us what the work means, but nothing about the manner in which they are so invoked seems to be sensitive to the work's value and interest, or to involve imaginative reconstruction.

In the remainder of this chapter I consider three distinct ways of answering this objection, the last of which is the one I favour and of which my proposal in the next chapter will be an elaboration. I devote time to the other two because they are likely to be the first to occur to an intentionalist, despite their being, as I will argue, less satisfactory than the third. The first is what I will call a *value-oriented response*, because it involves positing a distinct sort of intentionalist value for the appreciation of which reference to intentions is deemed indispensable. The second, which I will call an *ontological response*, appeals to a constitutive role for the artist's creative process in the very existence and nature of the work.

#### 4.2 *Value-Oriented Response*

The example I will be considering of a value-oriented response concerns (so-called) "achievement value." The notion of such value has been around for some time, but very few people have taken up the cause of saying what exactly it is supposed to be. In fact, as far as I know, among contemporary intentionalists only Noël Carroll (2009) has put the notion to any substantive use.

Carroll grants—in fact, argues—that "the distinguishing feature" of criticism is evaluation, that critical activities such as "description, classification, contextualization, elucidation, interpretation, and analysis ... are not generally thought to be ends in themselves; they are characteristically undertaken for the purpose of providing the grounds for the critic's evaluation of the artwork in question" (13). It therefore seems that he, too, takes criticism to manifest an "evaluative stance." But he is also known for his opposition to the Aesthetic Argument. The apparent conflict here has been noticed by Goldman (2009):

I agree that critics aim primarily to uncover the values (or disvalues) of works, but I see a tension between this central thesis and Carroll's defence of intentionalism in interpretation and evaluation. If a critic aims to facilitate an audience's appreciation of a work's value, doesn't that suggest that the critic ought to aim at allowing the audience to get the most value out of their experience of the work? Limiting



interpretation to the uncovering of value specifically intended<sup>5</sup> by the artist does not always allow for such optimal experience.

But the tension is not lost on Carroll, who, in the same book, addresses it as follows:

Since the point of criticism is to say what is valuable about an artwork, what is valuable about the artwork is the object of criticism. It is what the work of criticism is about. However, we have already established [under intentionalism] that the object of criticism is something that the artist is doing or has done in producing the artwork. So how can we combine these two insights about the object of criticism in a way that affords a more precise understanding of it? (2009, 51)

What Carroll seeks is a “connection between the artist’s action and what is valuable in the work,” and his answer is that there is a distinctive artistic value which is “a matter of whether or not the artist has succeeded in achieving her ends” (53). Call this a work’s *achievement value*.

There is a natural follow-up question, which Carroll anticipates: “What is it about that which the artist has done or is doing with respect to the artwork that gives the artwork value?” He responds in a roundabout sort of way by first distinguishing achievement value from what he calls “reception value,” that of “the positive experience that the work affords the audience” (53). He seems ultimately to want to say that achievement value is not something that can be experienced, but also that this shouldn’t disqualify it from being a genuine artistic value. In support of the latter claim he asks us to be on guard against a certain bias that “the only things that are valuable are experiences” (57), and to consider a value such as originality which he argues cannot be experienced.

Goldman (2009) is quick to seize on the presupposition that some values may not be experienced. He objects that Carroll has “an impoverished view of

5. Contrary to what Goldman (much like Gaut) seems to assume, such value need not be specified by an artist’s evaluative intentions on any given occasion. I will say more about this as I proceed.

the experience of artworks as bare sensory experience of the patches of paint or heard notes.” For although properties such as originality are

not experienced directly, [they] affect the ways we experience artworks; hence focus on these properties by critics does not refute the thesis that criticism aims to facilitate the most valuable experience of artworks in audiences and so should not be restricted by artists’ specific intentions<sup>6</sup> regarding the significance of their works.

This issue of experienceability is not, I think, as important as Carroll makes it out to be. Suppose Carroll is correct that some artistic values need not be experienced in order to be appreciated, and suppose we even grant him his example of originality. What does this show? Goldman, of course, is concerned to refute even this much because he is committed to a view on which facilitating experience is paramount for criticism (as detailed in the previous chapter). But what does the concession show for *intentionalism*? Nothing as far as I can see. It is quite consistent with originality being appreciable in a non-experiential way that it is also appreciable in an a-intentional way—as a relational property that a work bears to other works (and perhaps to an artistic tradition) regardless of the artist’s specific intentions. A separate argument is thus needed to establish why any such property, as a value, can only be appreciated as part of a critical process that invokes the artist’s intentions.

Now, Carroll does offer a separate such argument, but what will be important to see is that it is *separate*, that it does not rely on the foregoing claims of inexperienceability. As before, I choose to set aside questions about whether a given value must be experienced in order to be appreciated. Although it is natural for a contemporary intentionalist to appeal to inexperienceable properties, I will be content to have the relevant value be a species of what Carroll would call reception value, for my difference with value-maximizers will not be here.<sup>7</sup>

6. Goldman here again mischaracterizes Carroll’s position as being one which assigns weight to *evaluative* intentions. That anti-intentionalists reflexively take intentionalism about evaluation to involve evaluative intentions is a sign that this is an under-examined subject.

7. It does, however, bear mentioning that Goldman’s defence of experience is no less controversial than Carroll’s restriction, for a property’s (legitimately?) *affecting* experience (presumably when somehow or other known about) is not the same as its being *itself experienced*.

Carroll's separate argument is offered as a response to an objection that, in fact, is very much like Gaut's above:

a critical evaluation assesses what the artist has achieved, not what she attempted. Why should we care whether or not the artist had noble or aspiring intentions? The critic should only concern herself with the outcome ... (Carroll 2009, 77)

In response, Carroll observes that:

it is not the artist's intention that the critic is appraising. The critic is not saying, for example: "Oh, that's a very nice intention." Rather it is the artist's achievement, the product of the artist's agency or what she has done, that concerns the critic. Nevertheless, in order to assess what she has done, we need a notion of what she has done. And since what she has done is an action or a series of actions, that calls for a description of what has been done which alludes to the intentions that constitute the action or actions in question.

Carroll and his opponent agree that it is the artist's achievement that is of critical interest. The disagreement is said to concern "a notion of what [the artist] has done." The notion, or description, that Carroll favours is one which "alludes to the intentions that constitute the action or actions in question." The notion his opponent favours, by contrast, is presumably some a-intentional one, the achievement as a self-standing object, contextualized relative to art history perhaps, and to the relevant conventions, but certainly not to any specific artistic intentions.

This is one sort of debate we could have, and it may be that Carroll's position is to be preferred. But what is interesting is that Lamarque has conceded territory on this ground. Lamarque has not said that intentions are simply irrelevant to any process of understanding an artwork. Instead, he has drawn a distinction between "lower-level" processes like explication and "higher-level" ones like interpretation\*. And the objection has been that there is no need to invoke intentions at the higher-level. The only way for an intentionalist to make the opposite case is to relate intentions either to the *value-sensitivity* that

such a higher-level manifests or to the method of *imaginative reconstruction* that it employs. Carroll's efforts fit most naturally with the former option, given that he is attempting to describe a distinctive sort of value from which intentions are said to be ineliminable. I have been calling this a value-oriented response.

But how exactly is it supposed to work? Carroll's conclusion seems to extend only to the limited point that has already (for the sake of argument) been conceded: in order to evaluate a work one must have before one a work to evaluate, and this object is defined only relative to certain intentions of the artist—"a notion of what the artist has done." But now Carroll has run out of ground on which to stand. Intentions seem to be needed only to supply an object to then evaluate, but do not figure into this evaluation itself. Carroll in fact makes many claims to just this effect, e.g. "Intentions enter the critical picture for the purpose of identifying the nature of the artist's performance, including its implicit or internal goals. This information can then be used in order to gauge whether the work is a success on its own terms" (77). This is not far from Lamarque's view of things (*modulo* the part about "internal goals"). The objection, therefore, stands.

#### 4.2.1 *Achievement as Success*

So far I have given some reasons to doubt that Carroll has provided a helpful notion of achievement value. But we may wonder if there is not anything in the concept that Carroll has overlooked, or that we may bring out on his behalf. I am, however, pessimistic about such prospects. Let me explain why. I think it is very easy when one affirms the existence of achievement value to take this to mean simply *the value of that which the artist has achieved*. This notion is insufficient for present purposes. That the artist has achieved it may imply some role for intentions in defining *what it is that the artist has achieved*. But there is a further question about *the nature of the value of that which the artist has achieved*. If the relevant value is meant distinctively to be *achievement* value, then something must be said about what is valuable (a) about achievement as such (b) in the work. This is the minimum we need for it to be worth our time to further reflect on whether reference to intentions is needed to reconstruct

such value. We might therefore return to Carroll's earlier question: "What is it about that which the artist has done or is doing with respect to the artwork that gives the artwork value?"

One option is that achievement value is a sort of value arising simply out of an artist's achieving her intentions. That is, there is something valuable about success as such. This is plausibly what Carroll means when he says that achievement value is "a matter of whether or not the artist has succeeded in achieving her ends" (53). But this conception gives rise to a certain obvious worry, anticipated by Carroll:

it may be charged that if the artist's intentions are relevant to critical evaluation, then that gives the artist too much power. For in order to score a critical kudos, all the artist need do is to set her intentions very, very low. Imagine the dancer who, with no postmodern ambitions, announces her intention to simply bend over and pick up her car keys. Once she completes this action, does she deserve our applause? (69-70)

Carroll only chides the artificiality of the example, noting that artistic intentions "typically ... commit the artist to ambitions more strenuous than bending over successfully," that "artists rarely aim [so] low." But the worry may be taken more abstractly, as raising a question about the very nature of the value that Carroll is touting. Why should it matter that the intention aims high or aims low if the relevant sense of value is sensitive only to *success as such*? If that is what achievement value really is, then it should be equally present regardless of the *worthiness* of the success. By contrast, the fact that it matters that the dancer in the example did not have postmodern ambitions indicates that we are responding to more than just the fact that her intention was successful. At the very least, Carroll is talking about two different sorts of value: success value and (what we may call) *worthiness-of-success* value. While it may be true that whether or not the dancer's performance is interpreted as being postmodern depends on her intentions, once we make this determination we could, perhaps, carry out the evaluation of her performance independently of these intentions, relative only to the interest or worthiness of the specified type of performance. That is to say,

it is not clear that reference to intentions is necessary to a critical assessment of the worthiness of an achievement, once the nature of the achievement is fixed.

Perhaps an intentionalist could make the following sort of case: *It's true that the value of the performance in which a dancer picks up her car keys involves a lot of things beyond merely whether she succeeded in her intentions; but it involves at least this. So, to get a full picture of the value, intentions do have to be invoked.* This is not implausible, but I still have doubts. Even if we grant that success value is a distinctive sort of value associated with successful intentions, it still remains to be shown that it is a value *of the work*, not merely of the artist or of her intentions. The present construal of such value, being concerned with success as such, is not reassuring.<sup>8</sup> For while it is possibly a value of one's intention that it succeeds, it is not at all clearly a value of the *product* of this intention that it is the product of a *successful* intention. More simply put, it does not seem to be either a good or a bad thing about an artwork that it was made with largely successful intentions. Knowing further things in connection with this, like that the intentions were ambitious, might give one an *indication* of a work's value; but the mere fact about success certainly does not seem to *constitute* any sort of value.

Such a point has been made before, for instance by Wimsatt (1976). He describes as follows the argument to be rejected: "[t]he poet had a specific aim or plan in mind; he managed ... to carry this out in the poem; thus he is a successful artist; his work is good art" (127). Wimsatt objects that "here we may indeed be likely to assign a kind of merit, but it should be understood as referring to the artist himself (who was 'skillful' enough to do what he aimed at doing) rather than to the work." This would be what I have called the *success-as-such* portion of achievement value. For what I have called the *worthiness-of-success* portion, Wimsatt suggests that we attend, not to whether we can "prove that the artist achieved his intentions," but to "whether the proposed subject and technique were actually the most poetic conceivable" (128). Similarly, Saam Trivedi has

8. I set aside the more obvious complaint that this is just not a very interesting sort of value. As Goldman (2009) observes, "critics don't speak as often about what artists successfully intend as they speak about what their works say or do, what kinds of effects they have on viewers or what their aesthetic properties are."

claimed that “while the fact that the artist has been successful and skillful in realizing her intentions in her work is good for her it is not clear that the work must thereby be better or more valuable,” for “[such] value attaches to the *artist* though not necessarily to her *artwork*” (2015, 705).

To reinforce the preceding series of points, let me consider an argument from Huddleston (2012a), who is responding to Dominic Lopes (2011) about the artistic/aesthetic distinction. The context of their disagreement need not detain us here, but I will set the scene a little, for some of it is relevant.

Lopes laments the rise in the number of philosophers aligning themselves with a notion of non-aesthetic artistic value, and argues that any artistic value that is a value of art *as* art, not merely *in* art, is subsumable under aesthetic value. He considers, on behalf of his opponents, achievement value as a possible candidate for non-aesthetic artistic value, putting the case for it as follows (530):

art works are achievements whose value is realized in how they come to be.... We can assume, in general, that an item’s value as a member of a kind is its value as the product of an achievement of that kind. For example, the value of a song as a work of music is its value as a musical achievement. On this model,

$V$  is a value of an art work as art =  $V$  is a value of the work as the product of an artistic achievement.

Lopes accepts that “making a work of art is often an achievement,” but he does not think it follows that “it is in every case an artistic achievement.” He doubts the “artistic” part, for he does not think that an “achievement-based theory of artistic value” will be able to supply a suitable “theory of what makes an act artistic.”

My own concerns are somewhat different from Lopes’s, though we are both in a manner objecting to achievement value. I am concerned less to withhold the label “artistic” from such putative value and more to interrogate what kind of value it is even supposed to be. Lopes, following others, talks of a work having “value as the product of an achievement,” but it is possible for a work to have value *as* the product of an achievement—i.e. under the description

“achievement,” or “product of achievement”—without thereby having some distinctive *achievement* value.

Huddleston, in disagreement with Lopes, claims that “achievement value is ultimately going to need to underwrite artistic value. To the extent that aesthetic value is a component of artistic value, it is only *derivatively* so” (2012a, 712). His argument for this appeals to a case of indiscernibles, one Giorgione’s *The Tempest* and the other an array of paint randomly generated on a canvas by a machine. The two are said to produce “very rich aesthetic experience in many of the same ways,” but Lopes, adds Huddleston, “will surely want to say that only the painting produced by Giorgione has *artistic* value.” We might reply that the difference comes down to one’s being a work of art and the other’s not, but Huddleston believes that this is “just [to] restate instead of [to] answer the pressing question: What feature accounts for this drastic difference?” (713). Huddleston’s preferred answer is that “Giorgione’s painting is a great human achievement and the array is not. When aesthetic value is a value of art as art, it is only *because* this aesthetic value *has been achieved by an artist*.”

Here is my problem with such an answer. It might well be that what explains *The Tempest*’s aesthetic values also being artistic values, when this isn’t so for the array, is that it is an “achievement.” But it is something further to say that *The Tempest*’s being an achievement is a distinctive value that it has, an achievement value. A property can serve to explain why an object’s aesthetic values are also artistic values without thereby *itself* constituting something valuable about that object. At least in principle. Huddleston would need to say more about why this distinguishing feature is furthermore a distinctive *value* of the object it distinguishes. (He seems to want to say this.) The question, again, is merely: what makes one object an artwork and the other not? Lopes makes the useful observation that not all (purported) art-status-conferring properties also “realize any characteristically artistic value” (2011, 525). He has here in mind the so-called “institutional theory,” on which it is not an artistic value of a work that it has been inducted into (or is a member of) the relevant institution.

Huddleston’s example is, incidentally, very similar to one given by Gregory Currie in support of a very similar point, a denial that “a work’s aesthetic properties are independent of the artist’s achievement” (1989, 36). Currie asks



us to imagine an artistically superior Martian race an average child of which produces a painting that is unremarkable for them but indiscernible from a painting which we humans hold in high regard (Picasso's *Guernica*). The idea is supposed to be that both value judgments may be correct (ours that the human painting is great, theirs that the Martian one is not), each being predicated on the achievement that the relevant work represents relative to its community (human in the one case, Martian in the other). This is said to explain the alleged difference in value, the conclusion being that a work's status as an achievement is relevant to its evaluation. I have no problem granting this. All I have been wondering is whether this status itself represents an artistic value, and whether, furthermore, its critical reconstruction as a value requires invoking authorial intentions. It is not clear to me that either question should be answered in the affirmative.

What I wish to conclude from my efforts in this section is the following. There are reasons to doubt that achievement value is a distinctive sort of *value*, to doubt that it is a value of *artworks*, and to doubt, even if it is an interesting sort of artistic value, that to reconstruct what is interesting about it one must invoke the artist's intentions. I have argued for the first doubt by raising questions about what is supposed to be valuable about achievement as such, for the second by raising questions about what is supposed to be valuable about *artworks* in their being an *artist's* achievement, and for the third by separating the relevant value, or one construal of it, into that of success *simpliciter* and that of the *worthiness* of the success (where only the former, which is less interesting, seems to need reference to intentions).<sup>9</sup> While I do not take these doubts entirely to foreclose the possibility of achievement value helping to answer the value-sensitivity objection, I myself don't see how it could.

9. It might be objected that there is a third option, on which it is not merely success as such, nor quite worthiness of success, but something like the *intelligibility* of the success, the fact of an agent's creative handling of a medium, that constitutes an achievement that *ipso facto* is artistically valuable. I thank Eileen John for this suggestion. See John (2014), in which this is described as "taking reflective charge" (265). I am not entirely sure how to understand such a claim in the light of my own efforts, but I suspect that my positive proposal, gestured at near the end of this chapter and more fully worked out in the next, may accommodate the sort of insight at issue, in terms not of a distinctive kind of value but of a value-sensitive critical process which sometimes makes essential reference to such facts about the artist.

### 4.3 *Ontological Response*

One may notice a certain dilemma in the offing against the intentionalist. The link to evaluation is made either via interpretive intentions or via evaluative intentions (these exhausting the domain of possibly relevant intentions). On the first horn, the relevance is not “direct,” for interpretive intentions seem not to be required for value-sensitive critical processes like interpretation\*. But though evaluative intentions, on the second horn, might have some relevance content-wise, they equally don’t seem required, for what value an artist wanted her work to have does not seem to matter to a determination of what value the work in fact has.

The argument of the first horn was developed in the previous section, using Carroll’s remarks about how achievement value fits into artistic appreciation, but could be reiterated using a similar remark of Currie’s, for my contention is that this way of thinking is common. Based on his analysis of the Martian child example, Currie claims that

Our conception of aesthetic value is essentially bound up with *our* interests, experiences and abilities. And it is clear that we can have no adequate understanding of what the artist’s achievement was in producing a given work unless we have a detailed knowledge of the work’s history of production. (1989, 39)

Notice the distribution of duties. Determining a work’s value requires us to draw on our “interests, experiences and abilities”—in short, on what matters to us—but it is only for figuring out what it is we are evaluating—for an “adequate understanding” of the achievement—that production history is sought.

The idea behind the second horn, which is the more familiar anti-intentionalist route of objection, is not something I have developed at length, partly because it is familiar enough. Just as a joke’s offensiveness is felt not to be (to any significant degree) sensitive to whether it was intended to be offensive, maybe determinations of value are simply out of the hands of the artist. Aside from Gaut, whom I have already quoted on this point, consider Wimsatt (1976):

we should find no trouble in putting to one side the common artistic aim of creating a masterpiece—or perhaps of not creating a masterpiece, but just of turning out a potboiler—or of having a ‘lark’. ‘He intended only to appeal to popular sentiment; therefore we should not...’ (Or, to translate this kind of motive into the key of interpretive argument and thus get it out of the way: ‘We know that he thought of this as his masterpiece; therefore it...’). (127)

Wimsatt likens evaluative intentions to “secondary or ulterior intentions,” such as those of “making money” or “winning a prize,” and finds them irrelevant on the same grounds.

It seems to me that in such discussions anti-intentionalists take the second horn to be the intentionalist’s only option, and thereby dismiss the relation between intentions and evaluation a little too hastily. Meanwhile, intentionalists do not regard as in any way problematic the path of the first horn, and therefore fall headlong into the value-sensitivity objection. I have been trying in this chapter to urge the problem of the first horn. If I have been right in my claims so far, then the intentionalist does not have any promising resources on which to draw to elucidate a distinctive sort of *value* the reconstruction of which demands the invocation of intentions.

A different strategy, to which I now turn, is to secure for intentions an enduring evaluative relevance by viewing them as partly constitutive of the artwork.<sup>10</sup> An advocate of this is David Davies (2004). The “principal contention” of his book is that “artworks ... must be conceived not as the products (decontextualized or contextualized) of generative performances, but as the performances themselves” (x). His chief rival is the contextualist, who admits the relevance to criticism of such generative performances (also called “the creative process”) but only in terms of “relational properties” of the artwork proper, which happen to be of critical interest for one reason or another. My aim here is not to come down conclusively on Davies’s ontological thesis, but to examine the view he sets out about intentions and value, to which he devotes

10. One sense of this, which will not be my interest here, involves conceiving of intentions as “immanent” in the sort of thing we normally take to be an artwork. I have discussed such claims in previous chapters under the rubric of the neo-Wittgensteinian view.

the better part of a chapter.

Davies prefaces his remarks with an estimation, in accord with my own, of the status quo of the intentionalism debate:

Knowledge of what the artist intended is said [by Beardsley and Wimsatt] to be irrelevant, first, to the *evaluation* of her work, and, second, to the *interpretation* of her work. The irrelevance of artistic intentions to the evaluation of works is defended on the grounds that, in evaluating a work, we are interested in assessing what the artist *achieved*, not what she attempted to achieve. Critics have generally granted this point, and debate has turned upon whether a proper interpretation of what the artist achieved requires attention to what the artist intended. (84)

Davies favours an “uptake” theory of interpretation (one that is opposed to intentionalism). According to him, a work’s meaning is to be identified with “the meaning that a properly informed receiver, correctly applying the appropriate interpretive norms, would ascribe to a vehicle taken to be intentionally used to make a given kind of utterance” (89). But he nevertheless, in an unusual turn, takes “the actual intentions of the actual author” to have a “role to play in the proper appreciation or evaluation of the work,” despite the fact that for him such intentions have no role in “determining meaning-properties.” He makes sense of this by denying that the only way intentions can play a role in evaluation is via determining meaning-properties (or, more generally, contributing to value-neutral interpretation). It might therefore seem that he is denying the status quo rehearsed above, but, as it turns out, he is denying a different status quo, one pertaining to the work’s ontological category.

Let me present a simplified version of the argument Davies takes himself to be answering. I follow him in referring to the product of a creative process, what we normally call a work, as a “work-product.”

1. The proper object of critical evaluation is the work-product.
2. The artist’s intentions contribute to critical evaluation only by contributing to the value-neutral interpretation of the object of critical evaluation.

3. Therefore, the artist's intentions contribute to critical evaluation only by contributing to the value-neutral interpretation of the work-product.
4. The artist's intentions do not contribute to the value-neutral interpretation of the work-product.
5. Therefore, the artist's intentions do not contribute to critical evaluation.

(1) is a standard assumption. (2) falls out of the status quo of the intentionalism debate. (3) follows from substituting "the work-product" for "the object of critical evaluation" in (2), as dictated by (1). (4) is something to which Davies is committed through his independent defence of the "uptake" theory. The conclusion follows from (3) and (4), in that the only way for intentions to contribute to evaluation has been blocked.

I want to be clear that I do not take this argument itself, as it stands, to be very pressing against the intentionalist. For the intentionalist will of course be itching to reject (4), that intentions do not contribute to value-neutral interpretation. In practical terms, this would amount to contending with Davies's defence of the "uptake" theory, which I imagine many intentionalists will be happy to do. The argument's significance for me is as follows. I have been construing as a source of objection the widely accepted claim that intentions contribute to evaluation only by contributing to value-neutral interpretation. Now even if, *contra* (4), intentions *do* contribute to value-neutral interpretation, the contribution they thereby make to evaluation is, I have been saying, insufficient for them to be deemed important either to evaluation or to value-sensitive interpretation—certainly not important enough for intentionalism to be an interesting general theory of criticism. This is what I have been calling the value-sensitivity objection. So, naturally, I find it very interesting when somebody claims to be arguing, as does Davies, that a work's value may be "directly dependent" on the artist's intentions.

What does Davies mean by such directness? (I defined my own sense of it above, in terms of value-sensitive critical processes.) He claims that intentions may "bypass" meaning-properties in their contribution to a work's value. Although this is a claim primarily about intentions and works, not about the language and methodology of criticism, the former will have certain consequences

for the latter, in this case that works which merit the exact same value-neutral interpretation may nevertheless be felt to differ in value solely on the basis of a difference in the intentions with which they were created. It is worth examining whether the manner in which this plays out for Davies provides us with a promising line of response to the value-sensitivity objection. I will argue that ultimately it does not, though the way in which Davies sets up the dialectic is instructive.

He gives the following example. Imagine a pair of indiscernible novels produced by an author, Smith, in alternative scenarios,  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ . In  $w_1$  Smith intends the protagonist to be motivated by “fear of emotional commitment,” while in  $w_2$  Smith intends him to be motivated by “self-centered ambition.” Given that the novels are indiscernible, the “uptake” theory, which we may accept for the sake of argument, yields identical interpretations for both, including (suppose) the fact that the protagonist is motivated by self-centered ambition, not fear of emotional commitment. So the Smith of  $w_2$  has her intention corroborated by her work, while the Smith of  $w_1$  *doesn’t* have hers corroborated by *her* work.

Suppose further that “Smith’s earlier novels express a general view . . . that what motivates individuals in such situations is a fear of emotional commitment” (86). Given this background, continues Davies,  $w_2$  will seem to “represen[t] a deliberate attempt by Smith to express a view of human motivation different from that developed in her other works, and may therefore have appreciable properties and a consequent value in virtue of enriching and rendering more nuanced our understanding of the oeuvre as a whole and the other works in particular.” Meanwhile,  $w_1$ , “as a failed attempt to furnish one more illustration of a single thematic preoccupation, has no such virtues” (93–94). So it seems that we are inclined to find a difference in value between the two novels which must be due to the mentioned difference in intention, for *ex hypothesi* this is the only available difference. Thus, the intentions are making a direct contribution to value.

It will, of course, be wondered whether it is plausible that these imagined novels, which are said to be duplicates as far as meaning-properties are concerned, may so differ in value. Davies acknowledges the “air of unreality” about

his assessment, and therefore attempts to ground it “in a very concrete critical context”:

If two critics, subscribing to an “uptake” account of how the semantic or narrative properties of a given work are determined, disagree as to the actual narrative or semantic intentions with which a given linguistic structure was generated in a given context, they may as a direct consequence legitimately disagree as to the artistic properties and values of the work in question. (94)

Note that it is meant to be a “direct consequence,” not one that is mediated by a disagreement about the work’s meaning. For the critics are said to agree about this meaning. Their disagreement, in particular of value judgment, turns exclusively on a question of the artist’s intentions. Here we take there to be a single work, and the critics to be disagreeing about its value on the basis of disagreeing about the creative process by which it came about. One critic says that Smith is attempting to break from her oeuvre, the other that she is continuing in the trajectory of her oeuvre.

If such a situation is plausible, then we would seem to have an answer to the value-sensitivity objection, for it would seem to be possible for intentions to be invoked in a value-sensitive critical process (rather than only in a value-neutral critical process that independently feeds into evaluation). The Smith example, of which the above “critical context” is meant to be a more practical manifestation, admittedly is overkill, since it establishes the result in a sort of crude experimental fashion (demonstrating the desired sensitivity by excluding all other alternatives), but it *does* establish the result nonetheless, if we share Davies’s intuitions.

I suspect, however, that many people will not share Davies’s intuitions. For example, Kathleen Stock finds there to be “something wrong with the way the case under consideration is set up” (2005, 28). She doubts that such intentions could indeed be “relevant to appreciation” without making a “difference to the manifest properties of the work-product, i.e., the meaning properties of the text.” Her view is that

where a semantic intention is ascribed to the making of a work,

even by the author himself, perhaps in some external source such as an interview or diary, but where the work-product displays no evidence for it ... there is no reason to think the work takes on any relevant artistic properties as a result of the claimed intention, and so this kind of case cannot show us what Davies hopes it will. (29)

Stock thus rejects the example because, for her, an intention cannot be critically relevant if it does not, so to speak, “show up” in the work-product. The intention in  $w_1$  is alleged to be of this sort, not relevantly showing up in the work-product. The intention in  $w_2$ , given that it *does* show up in the work-product, would presumably be found by Stock to be critically relevant.

But this may be too hasty an explanation. Certainly it will be the case that many intentions which fail to “show up” in the work—which, as intentionalists typically say, are “unsuccessful”—will not be critically relevant. But some of them might be. I myself am not confident that the best thing to say about intentions such as the one in  $w_1$  is that they are critically irrelevant. I therefore propose to take a slightly different tack in explaining the example, which seems to give rise to some unstable intuitions.

Consider, again, Davies’s imagined critical dispute. We might take issue with the suggestion that critics frequently disagree as to a work-product’s value without in some manner disagreeing as to its meaning. At best, they might not know that they are having a disagreement about a more complicated sort of meaning than some simpler one about which they believe themselves to have settled their differences. I think this is evident, in fact, in Davies’s own description of the example. He says, as I quote above, that  $w_2$  “represents a deliberate attempt by Smith to express a view of human motivation different from that developed in other works,” and that  $w_1$  represents “a failed attempt to furnish one more illustration of a single thematic preoccupation.” Now, one way to understand this, the way Davies prefers, is to attribute one and the same “view of human motivation” to both work-products, and to construe the mentioned difference only in terms of the context of production (the creative process). This is, in effect, how Davies understands  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ : they are different generative performances that culminate in qualitatively identical work-products. But I am not sure that this is how Davies’s imagined critics will be likely to



discuss the work-product in question. (It is a *single* work-product in Davies's imagined critical dispute, the disagreement over which is said to turn on which of  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  is true.)

While it is common for critics to disagree about, and to take to be critically relevant, the question whether a *work-product* breaks from or perpetuates the trajectory of an artist's oeuvre, this is not what the critics here are disagreeing about, for they agree as to the work-product's meaning and presumably also about the trajectory of the artist's oeuvre. Therefore, they agree about whether or not the work-product is a break from or a perpetuation of this trajectory. They are disagreeing *simply about what the artist attempted*. But when a critic wishes to establish something about what the artist attempted, it is usually for the purpose of making a claim about the meaning of the work-product—that the work-product means *this* instead of *that*. Davies wants us to believe, instead, that critics will want to establish what an artist intended *only* to make a value judgment, holding fixed the work-product's meaning.

We will either find this implausible or just not have any clear intuitions. In the latter case, we may be tempted, however unconsciously, to import intuitions about the more common sort of case, in which it is *the work-product's* conformity to or deviation from the oeuvre that is in question. (In the terms of the original example, it is to take the work-product in  $w_1$  to indeed differ in meaning from the work-product in  $w_2$ , namely in the view of human motivation that each represents.) Such ambiguity is encouraged by Davies's language. He says that *the entire scenario*,  $w_1$  or  $w_2$ , represents such-and-such thematic departure or conformity, when we are used to speaking this way about *work-products*. This, of course, is conducive to Davies's conclusion, for the scenarios roughly correspond to the sort of thing *he* would call a work.

That said, Davies's discussion, though it does not provide us with a tidy solution to the value-sensitivity objection, does make salient the intentionalist's quandary. For Davies notes, correctly in my view, that it is not clear how an intentionalist proposes to account for the relevance to a work's evaluation of intentions which do not determine that work's meaning-properties. Some such intentions may rightfully be regarded as irrelevant, but with respect to others the intentionalist will, it seems, have to bite the bullet. The latter are

the intentions which do not quite make it into the work but still seem worth a critic's time, such as the "various *preparatory* explorations the artist went through" (2004, 82). Even if these are treated as "relational properties" of the work, the intentionalist still needs to account for their critical relevance. This is difficult because intentionalists typically regard such aspects of the creative process as "unsuccessful," hence *prima facie* irrelevant to criticism. This is the other edge of the double-edged sword I mentioned earlier, in relation to my provisional resolution of Gaut's objection.

#### 4.4 *Metacritical Response*

Value-oriented responses look to answer the value-sensitivity objection by providing a distinctive sort of value the reconstruction of which is said to require the invocation of intentions. Ontological responses answer by reconceiving the ontology of the artwork such that intentions are constitutive of the bearers of value. Both of these responses may be described as *metaphysical* in that they focus on the metaphysics of the terms in the relation of interest, i.e. that of *intentions* to the *value* of a *work*. Value-oriented responses focus on the second term, ontological responses on the third. One might equally focus on the first term, describing a kind of intention that has some *essential property* making it always relevant to a work's value. A failed candidate for this is probably the evaluative intention.

My preferred response is, by contrast, what I call a metacritical response, so labelled because it takes seriously the idea that the relation of interest is a *critical* relation. Such a response concerns, in the first instance, *discourse*, not the metaphysics of the entities involved in the discourse. I do not think that there is any specific value which essentially involves intentions, or that intentions need somehow to constitute the bearers of value in order to be evaluatively relevant. Nor, to mention the third option, that any particular sort of intention is specially suited to be so relevant. My suggestion is that the value-sensitivity objection may be answered by specifying a kind of critical *process* or *method*, in particular a kind of interpretation\* (as I call it above), that, due to its internal logic, makes essential *reference* to intentions. While it should be possible to

combine this approach with any of the above metaphysical approaches, my claim is that a metacritical response may be a *self-standing* response. Under it one can leave open a great deal about what sorts of intention are relevant to what sorts of value. Most of the details of the particular metacritical response I favour will be provided in the next chapter, in which I describe how a certain kind of intention-talk is manifested in criticism. Here I outline what a metacritical response should look like.

The metacritical approach has become unfashionable in the intentionalism debate as of late, but a recent example is Olsen (2010), who clearly enough recognizes his departure from the mainstream. The most noticeable difference is that he speaks not merely of intentions but of biographical information generally: “The problem of the artist’s intentions may be an interesting question in its own right, but the long debate about authorial intention that followed on the Wimsatt and Beardsley article and is still going on prevented the different question about the usefulness of biographical information as a critical instrument from being pursued” (441). Olsen does not say much about why the question of intention should have supplanted the one about biography, which, as he notes, was the more widely discussed question before Beardsley and Wimsatt’s article and, indeed, was the impetus for that article. My own contention (which I have articulated in previous chapters) is that Beardsley and Wimsatt’s focus on intentions stems from a very different sort of question, concerning an intention’s causal profile, which they sought precisely to *set aside*. For them, intention is simply a placeholder notion for what seems most causally efficacious in a semantically rich way. The semantic richness allows for the opportunity of trying to “match” a work to an intention.

Olsen is right, in any case, to talk more generally of biography, which is closer to the roots of the debate. But he departs from the contemporary mainstream in yet another way, with respect to which I propose not to follow him:

Those arguing against the employment of biographical information have made use of the concept of “legitimacy” rather than concepts like “relevance” or “usefulness.” The notion that some kinds of criticism are “illegitimate” because they employ biographical infor-

mation is a difficult one since this criticism often, though not always, seems useful or relevant. Usefulness and relevance are practice-based notions and their normative force is based in shared perceptions which are a result of mastering the practice. (436)

I think, *contra* Olsen, that it is important to hold on to some notion of “legitimacy,” even if not by that name. For it allows us to differentiate the sense in which Beardsley and Wimsatt *do not* object to the use of biographical information from that in which they *do*. Aside from the fact that they have no wish to *outlaw* any kind of information,<sup>11</sup> they also grant, as I describe in the first chapter, that intentions are often “useful” and “informative.” What they deny is that intentions may serve as *standards*, or that the mention of them can achieve any special status, other than that of a hypothesis to be tested. I have understood this to mean, more specifically, that intentions may not be mentioned as such in and as criticism, i.e. that such (inexpugnable) talk of intentions may not be *critical* discourse, though it may be historical discourse (which could have its own relevance *to* criticism, but is not *itself* criticism). Olsen aims to establish only that “[t]here are ... principles” which distinguish “the informative use and the uninformative use of ... information of the biographical kind” (449). But this is something with which Beardsley and Wimsatt can agree—in terms of, say, the distinction between a *fruitful* hypothesis and an *unfruitful* hypothesis.

Olsen’s efforts are nevertheless allied with mine. He makes many of the same moves that I have made. He, too, adopts what I have been calling a *criticism-first* approach, starting off by separating biography “as a historical discipline” from biography “as a critical instrument” (442). The former, he says, aims primarily to “give a historically correct presentation of the author and his environment,” while the latter is “used to understand the works produced by the author.” More to the point of the value-sensitivity objection, Olsen distinguishes three different uses for biographical information: as an “aid to understanding,” as an “aid to appreciation,” and as “an integral part of appreciation.” By “appreciation” Olsen means a form of understanding that “involves the recognition of a type of

11. As Wimsatt somewhat insultingly puts it, “[t]here is no way to keep the simpler kinds of intention-hunters from jumping on the vehicle of literary inquiry, and nobody I suppose wishes the power to legislate anything against them” (1976, 118).

value.” This, of course, is just the sort of thing for which I have been searching, namely a critical process that is sensitive both to value and to biography.

However, though Olsen does aim at something like my target, it seems to me that he stops short due to his reluctance to embrace any sort of standard of “legitimacy.” He demonstrates that biographical information is in some sense useful, but does not connect this to the intentionalism debate. One way to do the latter is in terms of the model of *evidence*, but, in line with his repudiation of any standards of legitimacy, Olsen denies that the uses of biographical information in which he is interested must conform to such a model.

Consider his discussion of Ian Watt’s attempt to “explain” the “apparent incoherence and inconsistencies” in *Moll Flanders* as “a consequence of Defoe’s way of working, of his aims, and of his attitudes” (443). We are told by Olsen that here “biographical information does not figure as ‘evidence’ in a literary interpretation.” But then, we might wonder, how exactly is it critically relevant? If Watt is not using reports about Defoe’s way of working as evidence for a certain interpretation (of incoherence and inconsistency), then how else is he performing *criticism*? Olsen claims that “Watt’s discussion contributes to an understanding in general of Defoe as an artist.” But to what extent is this also criticism of *Moll Flanders*? What is the precise connection between the biographical information Watt invokes and the interpretive claims he is encouraging us to accept?

Here is my own sense of what Watt appears to be doing. He mentions certain odd and somewhat incomprehensible events in the novel which to him “strongly suggest that Defoe did not plan his novel as a coherent whole, but worked piecemeal, very rapidly, and without any subsequent revision” (qtd. 443). This sounds like Watt is deriving his interpretation primarily from what the work itself suggests, from an ordinary sort of examination of the novel’s events. He then inquires into what must have been the state of mind of an artist who produced a work with such “discontinuities,” confirming his suspicions through an independent biographical inquiry which reveals to him certain facts about Defoe’s working habits. But if this construal is right, then Watt has shifted from an aesthetic inquiry to a biographical one (inferring facts about the artist from those about the work), and the adduced biographical information has

an uncertain critical status. Absent something like a standard of “legitimacy,” we have no terms in which to ask how the biographical information contributes to criticism of the work, rather than merely to a portrait of the artist.

I propose to extend Olsen’s analysis with my own value-maximizing variety of metacritical intentionalism. In the previous chapter, I described how certain types of biographical facts, in particular about “meaning-tracking” intentions and “meaning-determining” intentions, may be interestingly bound up with value-considerations. In short, an artist’s intentions may (to some extent) either track value or determine it. If this is true, then it may be seen how a value-sensitive critical process could make use of such intentions, seizing on such of their relations to value. This is my response to the value-sensitivity objection, which I will describe in more detail presently (the full scope of which, however, must await the next chapter).

#### 4.4.1 *The Value-Sensitivity of Biography*

Let us approach the issue in terms of experience, namely of what knowing about an artist’s biography could do to one’s experience of a work. Olsen gives the example of a critic who finds there to be a heightened “pathos” in a certain melancholy poem once he comes to “know that it was written by Charles Lamb—a fact which is no part of the poem—and know something of the tragic circumstances in his life” (qtd. 440). Beardsley comments on a similar case, in which a poet’s having been an octogenarian at the time she composed a certain poem is felt by a critic to add an “emphasis and significance” to the poem (1970, qtd. 35). Beardsley has the following to say about this:

I suppose that in many cases (I have doubts about this one) there might be no harm; and the importation might be allowable. But I insist that it *is* (clearly) an importation. The text of the poem does not supply an eighty-year-old speaker, nor, I think, does it require one to make poetic sense. We would not really be interpreting the poem, but treating the act of writing the poem, for the moment, as a biographical event. A poem, if reasonably tight, can take a certain amount of this kind of treatment without serious harm....

Therefore, whatever comes from without, but yet can be taken as an interesting extension of what is surely in, may be admissible. It merely makes a larger whole. (36)

This, again, is why I say, *contra* Olsen, that there is a “legitimacy” question, for Beardsley grants that the mentioned biographical information is admissible as an “importation,” but denies that it enjoys any special status that does not await confirmation. He would likely say of the Watt example that, though Watt treats Defoe’s work “for the moment, as a biographical event,” “there might be no harm” in adducing evidence of Defoe’s working habits, given that what such evidence suggests is an extension of “what is surely in” *Moll Flanders*. An intentionalist, to the extent that he wishes to disagree with Beardsley, must make the case that such information may be more than a hypothesis to be tested, not an “importation” but genuine criticism.

I now consider how a value-maximizer may treat the above sort of example, and then work my way to what I take to be the relevance of biography. Take the case of the octogenarian poet. Beardsley acknowledges that the text of the poem could be understood as indicating an aged speaker (if not quite an octogenarian, which may be too specific). The value-maximizer could likewise judge that construing the poem as having an aged speaker is in fact value-maximizing. Consequently, there is a question, first, about *why* it is value-maximizing. The following is how one sort of answer may go. (It is not important how things stand specifically with respect to the poem Beardsley is discussing, which happens to be from Marianne Moore’s *Complete Poems*.) There are certain phrases, or certain relations between phrases, or whatever other poetic features, which, when understood as indicating an aged speaker, allow for a valuable experience of the poem as a whole, such that applying this mode of experience relative to a suitable background range of works provides a cumulative value greater than that provided by other modes of experience.

The next question is more specific: *why* is it that this mode of experience maximizes the poem’s value? It seems to me that here answers will vary in type according to the interests of the inquirer. If one prefers *stylistic* answers, as presumably Beardsley does, then one may be told various things about the effects on our senses of the relevant poetic devices. But one may equally

prefer *biographical* answers, as presumably the intentionalist does, and then one may be told, if such should be the case, that certain facts about the artist have influenced which modes of experience are in common currency. These would be “meaning-determining” biographical facts. (Why a critic’s preference should matter here is something I leave for the next chapter.)

The third (and, for our purposes, final) question is yet more specific: *how* is it that certain facts about the artist have influenced which modes of experience are in common currency? Here answers will come in many shapes and sizes, but all of them will involve attributions of some sort of cultural influence. The idea is that the facts about the artist which are held to be critically relevant are those which are (or are expected to be) influential to such an extent that they begin to affect what are felt to be the appropriate modes of experiencing the sort of work in question. I gave an example of this in the previous chapter, concerning the odd sort of influence Ed Wood has had on the culture. What I showed there, and the result holds good for all art, is that whether or not facts about an artist are critically relevant depends on the state of the culture which the critic is addressing. This can mean that artists who were once irrelevant become relevant, as in the case of Ed Wood, or the reverse, that artists who were once relevant are no longer (due, perhaps, to the gradual fading away of modes of experience for whose availability they were partly responsible).

Critical judgments of this sort are not always obvious, either to readers of the criticism or even to the critics who make them. This is why I describe this phenomenon at the level of principles, which work “under the surface.” But merely to say this is not quite sufficient, for one must have some reason to think that they do, indeed, work under the surface. I believe that the example of Ed Wood, in particular of the history of the critical attention paid to him, provides some support for my hypothesis. But there are other cases. One of them may be Olsen’s final example, which he uses to illustrate the category of biographical information which is supposed to be an “integral part” of appreciation.

The example is of a certain critic’s take on Yeats’s *Meditations*. The critic adduces facts about Yeats’s youthful “hope that Ireland would produce, and that he would contribute to, an art both major and popular,” and proposes to read *Meditations* in the light of this hope, which is said to “reasser[t] itself in a



painful yet fruitful way" (2010, qtd. 447). The example is set up to highlight the informativeness of such biographical information. Olsen says that "Yeats' intellectual biography is used as a point of departure for a thematic analysis of the poems," such that "[w]ithout the knowledge of Yeats' dream of a sound national culture and the loss of that dream," parts of the work become "vague, if not unintelligible. Knowledge of Yeats' dream and what he suffered makes the content clear and gives the poem a poignancy which it would not otherwise have had" (448).

But how do we justify this invocation of biographical information *as criticism*, rather than merely as a hypothesis that must further be tested? Olsen says that the poem would become "vague, if not unintelligible" if the biographical information is not used to give it sense—so that, one imagines, there is nothing against which it *can* be tested. But what could Olsen say to somebody who maintains that the correct thing to conclude, then, is that the poem simply *is* "vague, if not unintelligible"? Olsen might reply, in the spirit of a value-maximizer, that this would be to forgo a valuable experience the poem could provide (the "poignancy which it would not otherwise have had"). At this point the objector may latch onto the series of questions I describe above, jumping to the second stage and asking what makes it the case that experiencing the poem in the proposed way, as an expression of a failed dream of a "sound national culture," makes it value-maximizing? Is it merely that this was Yeats' dream, or is it rather that, when so interpreted, regardless of whether anybody actually had such a dream, the work becomes capable of providing valuable experience?

Olsen does not consider such a line of objection, but there is something he says that could give credence to the idea that the value of experiencing *Meditations* as an expression of the mentioned failed dream is not entirely unrelated to its being *Yeats's dream*, more than just *a* dream with those same attributes (whether or not Yeats had ever had it). Olsen notes that "Yeats himself felt guilty about the 'troubles' because he saw the dream of a sound national culture, *that he had helped to foster*, as a partial cause of the violence to which the Civil War led" (447, emphasis added). But if Yeats had truly helped to foster the dream, then its having the poignancy that it does in the context of his work may be due at least partly to its being *his* dream. That *Meditations* comes in

Yeats's oeuvre after he is already a well-known poet makes it more plausible that what counts as a value-maximizing way to read that work is sensitive to established modes of experience to which Yeats himself contributed with his much publicized opinions and attitudes.

If some unknown poet, whose views had never been publicized, had produced qualitatively the same work as *Meditations*, perhaps this work would still be best interpreted the same way as *Meditations* (i.e. in terms of the failed dream), but then it is not clear that facts about this unknown poet's biography would be critically relevant after all (beyond merely being "useful" for suggesting hypotheses). At the very least, something further would need to be said to motivate any claims as to their relevance.

This is how "meaning-determining" intentions may be invoked as part of a value-sensitive critical process. The same may be true of "meaning-tracking" intentions, but to see this requires a greater attention to the rhetorical dimension of criticism; for such intentions need not affect the truth-conditions of interpretive claims (the very reasons why some meaning is value-maximizing). They are used more for the sake of reasons of intelligibility. I therefore turn, in the next chapter, to the centrepiece of my metacritical intentionalism, my account of how intentions may be integrated into critically relevant pieces of discourse.

## CHAPTER 5

### *How to Do Things with Intentions*

Approach? Either one has the truth about a poem or one does not. Approach? Just as a thousand misunderstandings will not alter in the least the possibility of a correct understanding, so a thousand varied approaches cannot negate uniqueness of meaning.

Then I began to eat of the tree of knowledge, so that my eyes were multiplied ...

– Geoffrey H. Hartman<sup>1</sup>

I argued in the third chapter that value-maximization theory provides the truth-conditions for interpretive statements, but also that one may build on top of this what I called a “metacritical intentionalism.” In the previous chapter, I described a signal advantage of construing intentionalism this way, namely that it answers a standing puzzle about how intentions may be relevant to evaluation. In the present chapter, I add to what I have said by describing in more detail the *metacritical* aspect of the view, for until now I have focused largely on its relation to an underlying value-maximization theory. Even if value-maximization theory is granted, along with the fact that sometimes an artist’s biography is interestingly related to the reasons why some meaning is value-maximizing, it still remains to be shown how such a relation manifests itself in criticism. Although I believe that there are many ways for it to do so, I here focus on one that I find salient, that of *conversation*. I begin, however, by rehearsing the sort

1. *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry*. 1966. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., ix.

of explanatory obligation I take myself to be discharging, which I describe in terms of a long-standing objection due originally to Beardsley and Wimsatt.

### 5.1 *The Dilemma Objection*

It is not enough, one might think, merely to point to “meaning-tracking” or “meaning-determining” intentions. For it might be granted in some given case that the artist is astute about what would maximize the value of his work, or that facts about him are part of the reasons why some meaning maximizes value, but doubt remain that a critic’s coming to know of such things will be critically useful. The sort of additional claim to which I earlier gestured relies on expanding the notion of what makes a piece of discourse critically relevant. I observed that Beardsley’s notion, given in terms of the individual statement, is not only unduly restrictive but also explanatorily inadequate, for it does not account for the *contextual* features of critical statements. (The notion of conversation I will go on to develop can be viewed as one such feature.)

If we open up the terms of the debate as I suggest, then it is at least possible that some account could be given of the critical relevance of biographical statements even though such statements are not *themselves* interpretive or evaluative statements. But this is just to restate the explanatory burden I have incurred. The intentionalist must still go on to provide some such account. The objection in terms of which I here press the urgency of this explanatory burden is one that has been fashioned with very much such a burden in mind. It has had a storied career in the debate, but has rarely, if ever, been treated in respect of its full history. Because I have not seen the objection satisfactorily answered elsewhere, I take myself, in answering it, to be providing something of more general interest than simply a vindication of my particular brand of intentionalism.

I call it the *dilemma objection*, and follow Beardsley and Wimsatt in their articulation of it:

One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the

poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. (1946, 469)

The critic is said in either case to be required to consult the work, so that she has already come to know what the work means in confirming the intention's "success." Even if it is true, therefore, that some intentions are "successful," there is never any benefit for a critic in attempting to figure out what those intentions are.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to see that this is an epistemic objection, but not of the common sort that is easily answered, the one on which it is said that critics never have relevant "access" to what the artist intended. The dilemma objection allows for such access, but questions its critical benefits. How does knowing what an artist intended help the critic in what she is trying to do? Even if the intention is successful, the critic can come to know this only through a procedure (consulting the work) that will independently deliver her the information she seeks (what the work means). So she is better off retreating to that procedure to begin with, forgoing the (at best) superfluous search for intentions.

Wollheim devotes careful attention to this objection (without bringing up Beardsley and Wimsatt, curiously). In his terms, the objection states that a search for the artist's intentions, roughly what Wollheim calls "retrieval," "is, from the critical point of view, on any given occasion either misleading or otiose" (1980b, 188). It is "misleading when its results deviate from the findings of scrutiny," viz. what I have described as consulting the work, "and it is otiose when its results concur with the findings of scrutiny" (188–189). The reason why *scrutiny* should not be deemed otiose, at least according to the objector, is that "retrieval can never do better than scrutiny, sometimes it can do worse, and which is the case cannot be determined without the benefit of scrutiny" (189).

2. Here the notion of "success" appears to involve simply a "match" in semantic content between intention and work. I have in previous chapters raised questions about whether this correspondence should be regarded as critically or aesthetically relevant. The present objection seems to me to proceed from a variant of such a question.

I focus on Wollheim because I take him to have offered the definitive statement of (and, as I will presently discuss, a *near*-definitive set of solutions to) this objection. Although it has variously been raised since Wollheim, the state of the argument seems still to lag behind him. Take Trivedi (2001), who brings up the objection in terms very similar to Beardsley and Wimsatt's (again, curiously, without citing either them or Wollheim):

how do we, as the audience, *know* whether the artist's semantic intentions have been successfully realized or not?... If there is a fit or match between the artist's actual semantic intentions and work-meaning when these are compared, then we can say that the artist's semantic intentions have been successfully realized.... [O]n the other hand, if there is no such fit, we can say that the artist's intentions have not been successfully realized. But, if we have figured out what the work itself means without reference to the artist's actual intentions ... then actual intentionalism is otiose. (198-199)

The dialectic that has come to surround Trivedi's contribution is not without interest, but in its failing to take account of how the dilemma has been treated in the past, in particular by Wollheim, it unnecessarily repeats certain mistakes. For example, in reply to Trivedi, Sheila Lintott observes that "successfully realized intentions are frequently, in art and elsewhere, a matter of degree" (2002, 69). Wollheim has considered such a reply, that "the creative process may be realized in the work of art to varying degrees," but found that it "presents no real problem," that "the objection can surely concede that the creative process may be realized to varying degrees" so long as it is recognized that "retrieval is misleading if, and as soon as, it is carried beyond this point" (1980b, 189-190).

Wollheim canvasses a number of such replies. Each of them offers some insight, but none, in my view, is ultimately satisfactory. In one, it is ventured that "there is something that reconstruction of this [successful] part of the [creative] process can bring to light which scrutiny of the corresponding part of the work cannot. It can show that that part of the work which came about through design did indeed come about through design and not through accident

or error" (190).<sup>3</sup> This, of course, presupposes that "criticism is concerned to find out not just what the work of art is like but what the work is like by design" (190–191). But such a claim is precisely what needs to be explained—that facts about production history may be critically relevant—so it cannot be presupposed.

Wollheim may be viewed as defending the presupposition in his subsequent denial that the critical relevance of intentions must be a function of "the likely degree of match between the creative process and the resultant work" (192). According to Wollheim, the critic may "continue to be interested in the creative process even in the case when he knows that there is a mismatch between the two." I have some sympathy with this idea—and, indeed, will defend a variant of it shortly—but I think there is a danger, in accepting it, of sanctioning a change of subject. Attention to the creative process for its own sake, regardless of what it reveals about the work, should not be regarded as a *critical* end. Wollheim claims that inquiries into aspects of the creative process which do not "match" the work may constitute "description profounder than scrutiny can provide," but it is not entirely clear what he means, why this is description not only of the creative process but also of the work.

In his final and most forceful reply, Wollheim calls into question the objector's assumption that scrutiny is an independent check on retrieval. He insists that scrutiny, far from being unproblematically self-sufficient, "needs to be filled out by a definition of the person whose scrutiny is authoritative, or 'the ideal critic', and any such definition must be partly in terms of the cognitive stock upon which the critic can draw" (194). He does not here define what a "cognitive stock" is supposed to be, but does elsewhere: "what I actually perceive will vary not just with the visual stimuli that I receive but also with the knowledge, belief, and conceptual holding—what I shall call the cognitive

3. It is not quite true to say that scrutiny cannot reveal what the work is like by design. As Carroll (1992) observes, one can come to discover failed intentions through noticing irregularities in the words used by an author, which may indicate that the author probably intended something other than what was said (100). See also Redpath (1976): "it is sometimes possible to detect from inspection of a poem, particularly in the case of an inferior poem, that the poet has not said exactly what he meant to say" (15). Similarly, the absolute intentionalist is surely right in holding that works are often the best clue we have to the intentions of the artist (even if, as I have maintained, it is not the business of criticism to treat them as such).

stock—that I bring to bear on the visual stimuli” (1993, 134). Wollheim takes admissibility to the cognitive stock to be determined by whether or not the item in question “contribute[s] to scrutiny,” i.e. is “capable of modifying our perception of a work of art” (presumably to the effect of a *correct* perception). He then notes that among such items will invariably be beliefs that “need to be acquired independently” of such perception, through an “external” source. Some such beliefs are said to pertain to the artist, in which case scrutiny may be seen to rely on the fruits of retrieval. Wollheim concludes that there is no sense in asking which of scrutiny and retrieval is “otiose,” for scrutiny will in such a manner rely on retrieval at least as much as it is relied on by retrieval.

However, the examples Wollheim gives are, again, precisely what need to be explained, rather than assumed to have the upshot that he attributes to them. One such example is that “a reader’s response to Hardy’s ‘At Castle Boterel’ will be modified when he learns that the poet’s wife had just died” (1980b, 193). This undoubtedly carries intuitive appeal—we take such facts to somehow be worth the critic’s time—but it is always open to the anti-intentionalist to explain this appeal in terms more favourable to her, as in the previous chapter I showed Beardsley to have done with respect to the example of the octogenarian poet. Here the anti-intentionalist might say that the poem clearly enough supplies a bereaved speaker, and that to read facts about Hardy’s life into it may be acceptable if they are consistent with the latter.

There is a second part to the example which may be more difficult to treat in such a way. Wollheim adds that the reader’s response “will be modified again as he learns how unhappy [Hardy’s] marriage had been” (1980b, 193). The anti-intentionalist is likely to say that nothing in the poem even hints at this.<sup>4</sup> Wollheim, of course, will agree, but take this to establish his point—that the reader must go outside the poem for such facts in order to correctly experience the poem. One subject of dispute will thus be whether or not “going outside” is indeed required for correct experience. But another, perhaps more

4. This is not the anti-intentionalist’s only option, for there may be ways to read the poem as suggestive of, if not quite an “unhappy marriage,” at least rumblings. Barbara Hardy (2000) notes that the speaker “creates two points of view, one self-centred and the other place-centred, and shuttles between the two. The space between the two is small but significant, because it deromanticizes or undermines love’s hyperbole” (145).



interesting dispute will concern what to make of such a requirement (supposing that something like it obtains). Consider that a value-maximizer might agree with Wollheim that the speaker ought to be read as having had an unhappy marriage—if this is what Wollheim means<sup>5</sup>—but might take this to be due to the value that a reader would extract from the poem when it is so experienced. This would be yet another way to account for the intuition that biographical facts are worth the critic's time.

Wollheim would deny that this is how their relevance is to be explained, in effect as hypotheses to be tested, for he believes that having such facts in tow is *part* of the very test we would perform. But it is not clear what grounds he has for believing this. He claims that certain aesthetic properties—we are never quite told which—are open to scrutiny only if one brings to the experience antecedently held beliefs about the artist (which themselves are not apparent in the work). But is it necessary that these beliefs be *true*, i.e. really describe the actual artist? Suppose Hardy's wife had not just died, but that the poem was indistinguishable from the actual one. Presumably the effect of believing that his wife had just died would be the same on a reader of the poem in this alternative scenario, but Wollheim would, I imagine, insist that in this case the response is incorrect. Yet such a consequence is just what needs to be explained, cannot be presupposed.

It makes sense, of course, for intentionalists to try to answer in such a way, for it is easy to think that this is the only way in which retrieval may be a self-standing and independently useful critical practice, not rendered otiose by another practice of which we must always first avail ourselves to confirm an intention's "success." Without foreclosing the latter sort of answer, I propose to follow a different (and, I believe, largely uncharted) intentionalist route. I choose to describe the relevance at issue in terms primarily of what critics are *trying to do*, of the *use* to which they are putting biographical facts, rather than of some antecedent relation between intentions and work.

Observe that, though Wollheim is ostensibly talking about methods of

5. Strictly speaking, all Wollheim says is that a reader's response to the poem will be "modified" upon learning the mentioned facts about Hardy's life experience, but this does not entail that such experience is to be attributed to the speaker.

criticism—retrieval and scrutiny, respectively—he gradually slides into talk of perceivers, of what is necessary for certain kinds of perception. Similarly, Trivedi speaks of how *audiences* come to know whether the artist succeeded, rather than, as Beardsley and Wimsatt do, about how *critics* come to know. This difference in terminology is important, for it signals a shift away from the subject of criticism and toward that of experience. The ambiguity is encouraged by Beardsley and Wimsatt, in their conception of the relevant “use” being one of figuring out what the work means—which, in some sense, both critics and audiences do.

Most intentionalists follow suit, taking for granted that the “use” to which critics are to put any given piece of information is the same sort of use to which audiences will put that information, namely as an item in their “cognitive stock.” But producing criticism of a work is a different sort of activity from experiencing that work, even if it typically relies on the critic’s having had the relevant experiences. One famous characterization of the difference is due to Arnold Isenberg (1949), who contends that the critic has in mind certain perceptible qualities “which he *sees* and which by his use of language he *gets us to see*” (336). Isenberg goes on to give a controversial view of how such language operates, which we need not accept.<sup>6</sup> What is important for me is only his acknowledgement that the critic’s activity vis-à-vis perception is crucially mediated by her *use of language*. She is concerned with perception not as something she herself must do but as something she must by means of her language enable her readers to do (upon their appropriate exposure to the work). Thus, the notion of a “cognitive stock” is somewhat out of place in this discussion. The critic makes use of methods such as retrieval and scrutiny not to experience the work but to engage in discourse that has the function of enabling her readers to experience the work.

With this in mind, we may dispute the terms of the dilemma as follows. It is not obvious, to begin with, that an intention is otiose just because one must scrutinize the work in order to discover whether or not that intention has been successful (supposing this to be a requirement). It may be true that once one has

6. See Siegler (1968) for a critical but sympathetic assessment.

discovered what the work means, through scrutiny, there is no further question to answer about *what the work means*, hence no need to consult intentions for *this* purpose. But there may still be a need to consult intentions for the purpose of making the work accessible to readers. The latter is, after all, as I argued in the third chapter, the function of criticism.

Nor must the terms of the second horn be accepted, on which the intention is deemed misleading if found to be unsuccessful. For an unsuccessful intention is misleading only if it is accepted as something the work means, if it is (so to speak) read into the work. But, again, information about an unsuccessful intention need not be sought by a critic for the purpose of recommending that it be admitted to the audience's cognitive stock. The critic may mention an unsuccessful intention precisely to recommend that consumers of the work *not* admit the intended meaning to their cognitive stock (to whatever extent this is within their control). I take this somewhat to vindicate Wollheim's belief that intentions which do not "match" the work may still be critically relevant.

The latter possibility again brings out the argumentative burden of describing how such recommendations may bear witness to the critical relevance of intentions *as such*, beyond merely of the intended content of which the critic would say the same whether or not it was intended. To discharge this sort of burden, I next discuss what I take to be a common way in which critics integrate into their criticism biographical facts as such, that of constructing a "conversation." I say more about my specific proposal in due course, but first I clear the ground by examining the existing literature on such analogies from conversation, to which I take my view to be a contribution.

## 5.2 *The Conversation Analogy*

There is no such thing as conversation. It is an illusion. There are intersecting monologues, that is all. We speak; we spread round us with sounds, with words, an emanation from ourselves. Sometimes they overlap the circles that others are spreading round themselves. Then they are affected by these other circles, to be sure, but not because of any real communication that has taken place, merely as a scarf of blue chiffon lying on a woman's dressing-table will change colour if she casts down on it a scarf of red chiffon.

– Rebecca West<sup>7</sup>

Let me begin my examination of the conversation analogy by confirming that it is indeed an *analogy*. For we are not being asked to suppose that any sort of literal conversation is taking place by means of the artwork (though this could separately be true). In response to such questions, Carroll, the chief exponent of the analogy, clarifies that his view is not that “artworks and our reception of them are literally conversations” (2007, 404, n. 4). He attempts only to “*analogize* artworks to conversations (rather than classifying artworks as conversations) in order to suggest that we have interests in artworks that are like the interests we have in many conversations—namely, interests in understanding our interlocutor.” The point of analogy is thus an *interest*.

Though Carroll seems to take this interest to be one of “understanding our interlocutor,” he believes, more properly, that it is an interest in attaining “a sense of community or communion that itself rests on communication” (1992, 118). The connection comes from the notion of “fulfilling conversation,” which is said to be a means to such communion but also to require “that we have the conviction of having grasped what our interlocutor meant or intended to say.” Our interest in artworks is explained by analogy from such conversations:

this prospect of community supplies a major impetus motivating our interest in engaging literary texts and artworks. We may read to be entertained, to learn, and to be moved, but we also seek out artworks in order to converse or commune with their makers. We

7. “There Is No Conversation.” 1935. In *The Harsh Voice*, 85–175. J. Cape, 85.

want to understand the author, even if that will lead to rejecting his or her point of view. (118)

Although in the third chapter I argued, *contra* Carroll, that it is not a *function* of art to supply such fulfilling conversations—for it does not seem to me that it is in the service of *conversational* needs and interests that we conceptually segregate artworks as such—it remains to be shown that my objection generalizes to the analogy writ large (which need not entail a claim about the function of art). My efforts in the present section can be so described. I will argue that while there is something compelling about Carroll's proposal it cannot quite be accepted as it stands, as a proposal directly about the *experience* of art.

There are two parts to his proposal, one or both of which may be rejected: his characterization of conversational experience, and the manner in which he analogizes it to art experience. I aim to reject the latter on the basis of accepting the former. So I start by defending him as far as that is concerned (his characterization of conversational experience), for he has incurred objections on both counts.

Dickie and Wilson (1995) dispute that “in conversations hearers always have the standard goal Carroll envisages. Hearers always have as a goal the understanding of a speaker's utterance” (245). It is granted that sometimes a speaker will aim to understand the meaning not of the utterance but of the utterer—for instance, in cases of “utterances that are clearly failures on the part of the speaker,” or “puzzling” and/or “ambiguous” utterances. But these are deemed too idiosyncratic to be of much help in defining the “overwhelming majority of fulfilling and unfulfilling conversations,” in which “a hearer's goal is almost always to understand a speaker's utterance meaning.”

Carroll replies, rightly in my view, that “the importance of the meaning of the utterance in conversation” is due to the fact that “in large measure utterance meaning is the best guide to speaker meaning” (1997, 308). Dickie and Wilson believe that we attend to the speaker's intention only when the situation is unusual (e.g. the utterance somehow arouses suspicion), but Carroll can grant this while holding that we have some sort of overarching aim in most ordinary conversations to get the speaker right, and that attending to utterances is normally assumed to be the best way to do this (hence conversation taking

the form of an exchange of utterances).

To help illustrate his position, Carroll imagines two cases in which he is “stopped at a street corner in New York City and ... asked for the whereabouts of the Empire State Building” (308). In the one case, he is asked by a “traveler, with suitcase in hand,” and in the other by a “pollster, with clipboard in hand, doing research on ... geographical knowledge.” It is clear that each of these conversations is oriented around an exchange of information. The pollster engages Carroll in conversation because she wishes to record his level of knowledge. The traveller engages him in conversation because she wants directions. Both wish to know what he knows (or, more neutrally, to learn what he believes). Carroll concludes from this that he must “presume or conjecture a framework that will situate what [the inquirer] intends to learn by means of saying ‘Where is the Empire State Building?’” But this perhaps obscures the point of the example.

Here is what I think the point should be. Carroll seems to claim, and we all agree, that it is only for the purpose of learning a certain thing that the inquirers engage him in conversation. The fundamental or ultimate aim of each is to acquire certain information. Now, it is primarily in what Carroll *intends* to say that what he *knows* is reflected. His utterance, the words that he uses, are merely the instruments by which he is conveying the knowledge in which the inquirer is ultimately interested. She attends to the uttered words only under the assumption that they will reliably convey to her the information she seeks. This explains why, as Dickie and Wilson observe, she would begin attending more carefully (in ways normally deemed unnecessary or even perverse) to Carroll’s intentions if his utterance fails. For if his utterances are no longer deemed a reliable vehicle for his intentions, and the latter contain the information she seeks, then of course she will ignore the utterances and construct some other means of getting at the intentions (assuming, naturally, that Carroll sincerely wishes to convey the information). But common to both the normal case and the case of utterance failure is the hearer’s ultimate interest in what the speaker intends.

Suppose we reach this sort of conclusion. What difference would it make? Wilson introduces into the discussion a term that will help us see the differ-

ence. He says, in a separate reply—but in line with his earlier remarks with Dickie—that on “occasions ... when a speaker’s utterance is puzzling or obscure ... knowing what the speaker meant or why she said what she said assumes higher priority” (1997, 309). He calls this an “ordinary example of a ‘meta-conversational’ interest,” but argues that such interests, in which intentions are given a “higher priority,” will not be “as universal as [Carroll’s] claims about conversation ... suggest.” If I am right, however, then they will indeed be as universal as Carroll suggests.

Let us first get clear about what exactly a “metaconversational” interest is supposed to be. Wilson uses this term very casually, only the once. I imagine he has in mind the following sort of distinction. A metaconversational interest is an interest *of* a conversation, that which motivates us to engage in conversation to begin with. A conversational interest, by contrast, is an interest *in* a conversation, that which motivates us to do certain things while engaged in conversation. Presumably, one’s reasons *for* engaging in a conversation are not unrelated to one’s reasons for doing certain things *while* engaged in that conversation. So metaconversational interests, to some extent, guide conversational interests. If one has a metaconversational interest to find out from one’s interlocutor whatever one can about a certain subject, then one’s conversational interests will dictate, say, paying closer attention when one notices that subject come up, or perhaps forgoing certain conversational proprieties for the sake of getting the information.

Now consider the possibility that, as Carroll suggests, most of our metaconversational interests give priority to the intentions of our interlocutors. I believe this is true, for most of our conversations are motivated by a desire to exchange information or goods. The information which we have to exchange is ours in the sense that it is *known* (or believed) by us. Should we wish to convey it to our hearers, we use specific words under the belief that they will be suitable vehicles for that information. What matters, however, is *what* we as speakers know, not *how* we make it known. Something similar is true also in the case of exchanges of goods. Carroll gives what we may take to be an example of the latter:

If someone with a cigarette in his mouth asks me for a match and all

I have is a lighter, I will hand him the lighter, on the assumption that he wants me to ignite his cigarette. I will do this rather than doing nothing at all on the assumption that he, say, is a match collector.  
(1997, 308)

My metaconversational interest here is to get a light for my cigarette. The words I use are chosen merely for their expedience at conveying this information; they hold no independent interest. To the extent that my interlocutor knows (or believes) that people who ask for matches normally are looking for just any way to light a cigarette, what he will subsequently do is very likely to serve my metaconversational interest. I am not looking, metaconversationally, for him to understand the utterance-meaning of what I have said. It equally serves my metaconversational interest if my interlocutor does not strictly speaking understand the meaning of my utterance but, say, has several times in the past heard what I utter be uttered by a person who is subsequently helped to light his cigarette, and correctly infers my intention.

Admittedly, not *all* metaconversational interests are of this informational sort, where what matters is simply what the speaker knows, not how he conveys what he knows. I might really enjoy a friend's accent or diction, and engage him in conversation with the metaconversational interest of appreciating this accent or diction. Here I am not looking to learn anything from him, or to participate in any (tangible) exchange of goods. I simply wish to hear him talk. To sustain such a conversation, I might have to summon the conversational interest of minimally attending to the meanings of his utterances. For even if he is tolerant of my somewhat disrespectful metaconversational interest (should he become aware of it), he might not wish to talk very long with somebody who does not minimally reciprocate in the form of at least vaguely relevant replies. But note that, even with the latter qualification, my *metaconversational* interest is sensitive neither to his intentions nor to the meanings of his utterances.

Carroll would likely say of such a conversation (as he says of "firings") that it is not what he is looking to analogize to the experience of art. The conversations in which he is interested are, again, "fulfilling" or "serious" conversations, and in these, he thinks, there will always be (what I am now calling) a metaconversational interest to commune with one's interlocutor (e.g. share in her



experience), which will involve giving her intentions a “high priority.”

This need not be *ad hoc*. We might say that my example is of a conversation that is indeed frivolous, that does not take advantage of what conversations have the capacity to provide. The fact that I am *conversing* with my friend does not much matter to my reasons for doing so. One’s metaconversational interests with respect to conversations that are good *qua* conversation, by contrast, should at least be sensitive to its being *a conversation* that one is using to satisfy the interests. Perhaps such sensitivity must involve the rationality or agency of the person with whom one is entering into conversation, which, in turn, will involve the interlocutor’s intentions, for these will inextricably be bound up in her rationality and agency. So at least one such argument could go. I think, therefore, that there are good grounds on which to accept Carroll’s characterization of ordinary conversation (at least of the “fulfilling” sort).

What, however, would be the resulting analogy to art? It would lead, it seems to me, to a picture very similar to the absolute intentionalist’s (as described in the second chapter). The absolute intentionalist, recall, has a theory of meaning on which the work properly speaking has no meaning except in the derivative sense of pointing, as it were, to what the artist intended. The work is a mere “clue,” as Irwin maintained, to the meaning that is “in the mind” (1999, 58). Carroll achieves a similar result in different terms. He need not say that the work has no independent meaning, but may hold that whatever it independently means is of no interest, for our interest is in what was *intended* rather than in the specific *vehicle* that happened to have been chosen to *convey* what was intended.

Let me justify this reading of the analogy. I have said that interlocutors have metaconversational interests that dictate why they are in a conversation to begin with—what they hope to get out of it—and that these almost always, at least in “fulfilling” conversations, give high priority to the intentions of speakers. Conversational interests then guide interlocutors during the conversation to the end set by such metaconversational interests. To analogize this sort of framework to art is to say that what audiences really are doing, the reason why they approach works to begin with, is to commune with the artist, and that their engagement with a work, which includes attending to its features,

only provides the means by which they may achieve their ultimate end of so communing. The work, like the utterance, is to be treated merely as a vehicle used by the artist to convey his intention, and as having no independent interest.

We may further re-describe, in the terms of the present analogy, a certain defence that absolute intentionalists routinely offer (covered in the second chapter). The absolute intentionalist says that although works are mere clues to the artist's intention, they are the "primary" or foremost such clue, taken to be more reliable as to the relevant intentions than even sincere reports by the artist. This is meant to mitigate the embarrassing consequence that the work seems not to matter. Works do matter, replies the absolute intentionalist, but as the best clue we have as to what, so to speak, *really* matters (the intention). Similarly, Carroll may defend himself by saying that, although our "metaconversational" interest is to commune with the artist, and the work is merely a vehicle for this, it is the "primary" or foremost such vehicle, the best evidence of the information we seek, hence in some manner indispensable. However, as I said in my initial discussion of this argumentative strategy, I do not take it to suffice, for we are given no reason to think that, under such a proposal, the work *is* in any manner indispensable. Why, for example, are not sincere reports of intention from the artist equal or better evidence *of the intention*?

Perhaps Carroll has in mind a different analogy, one that does not align him so closely with the absolute intentionalist, but he does not say. Indeed, he has been criticized for not saying, for instance by Wilson who complains that Carroll "fails to offer the necessary explanations" (1997, 309). It is quite probable that Carroll would not accept the claims at which I have arrived on his behalf, but the fault lies, I believe, with his analogy, which I have seen through to its logical conclusion. I do, however, think that this analogy, even as I have explained it, has a kernel of truth. But this must carefully be teased out.

### 5.2.1 *Experience and Interpretation*

Let me distinguish, somewhat belatedly, two sorts of analogy one could make using Carroll's basic proposal. One is to art *experience*, the other to art *interpretation*. Carroll speaks in terms of both. He says that our experience of art is

analogous to “engaging” in a conversation, and that our interpretation of art is analogous to interpreting<sup>8</sup> an interlocutor in conversation. So, of course, both could be. But the two sorts of analogy do not entail each other. In fact, they require very different kinds of defence.

My objection in the previous section is really to a certain conception of art *experience*, under which consumers do not much care about the artwork outside of its function of reliably leading to communion with the artist. But this conception, aside from what it itself says, has certain consequences for criticism. For instance, if consumers didn’t much care about the artwork then critics likewise, in crafting their interpretations, would be less interested in the artwork than in what the artist intended to convey by means of the artwork. Much of what may be attributed to Carroll with respect to interpretation is thus in the register of *consequences* of a prior claim about experience.

I am inclined, as I have said, to reject any claims to the effect that the experience of art serves the same sorts of interests as does the experience of conversation, if the latter is understood along the lines I have described. For it seems to me crucial that in experiencing art we *do* adopt something like what Beardsley calls the aesthetic point of view, and our typical metaconversational interests are not relevantly similar to the interests in the service of which we seek out opportunities to take an aesthetic point of view. But perhaps some such analogy as Carroll’s can be maintained with respect to the interpretation of art, not as a *consequence* of his claim about experience but on *independent* grounds. There are a number of ways this could go. Before describing my own, which I do in the next section, let me consider another which has recently attracted attention. Clarifying what I take to be the latter’s shortcomings will serve as a

8. Lamarque objects that it is “odd ... even to speak of *interpretation* in a conversational context,” for “[n]ormally, conversational remarks are grasped (their meaning grasped) and responses elicited without any deep reflection and without any need for *interpreting*” (2002, 288). Carroll might reply that so much is true also of art, the experience of which, like that of conversation, involves for the most part grasping meanings without “any deep reflection and without any need for interpreting.” See, e.g., Eaton (1973): “In ordinary conversation it is taken for granted that a speaker ... has said the words he wanted to say and that those words mean what he thinks they mean.... The same holds true for an author. When we are faced with a literary work, we assume that the locutionary intentions of the author have been carried out, for example, that there are not printing errors” (61).

useful transition to my alternative.

The proposal I wish to highlight is due to Huddleston (2012b), who objects to Carroll on the grounds that “the central image of the conversation . . . does not deliver the actual intentionalist result he desires, whereby authorial intentions ought to act as a damper on the interpretations we can appropriately put forward” (241). Huddleston frames his discussion in terms similar to my own, distinguishing a “semantic” thesis about “what the text qua utterance really means” from “a normative claim about interpretive policy” (244, n. 8). These roughly correspond to what I have called a theory of meaning and a theory of criticism, respectively.

Of particular interest to me is the fact that Huddleston criticizes the semantic thesis for being too easily circumvented: “the non-intentionalist can always ask: ‘fine, suppose you are right, but why should I care about *that* [intended meaning], instead of just any interesting *non-intended* meaning that I can sensibly find in the text?’” The answer will, of course, be: *because that is what the work really means*. But Huddleston is likely to ask: *why care about what the work really means?* This may sound perverse, due to what we take to be the normative implications of meaning, but we have already encountered such an attitude, not in any anti-intentionalist but, strangely enough, in no less absolute an intentionalist than Irwin, who, as I describe in the second chapter, casts aside his intentionalist theory of criticism to save his intentionalist theory of meaning. Huddleston thus makes something like my point in privileging the “normative” (or, as I would call it, the metacritical) version of intentionalism. All I would add is that the semantic version is irrelevant by itself, being summoned, as by Hirsch, only for the purpose of leading to some normative claim that could vindicate critical discourse that makes (inexpugnable) reference to intentions. For this is what the intentionalism debate is ultimately about.

According to Huddleston, “good” conversations have two essential features, what he calls *mutuality* and *openness*. Mutuality is defined as “some back and forth between the participants,” and openness as “the ideas of . . . [both] participants . . . matter[ing]” (249). The former fails when one participant monopolizes the conversation, preventing the other from having her say, the latter when each participant has her say but one of them *intellectually* monopolizes the

conversation, not letting the other's contributions matter. This second failure is the one Huddleston attributes to Carroll, who is taken to believe that "any reading that diverges from the one that the author intended is a reading that is hermeneutically inappropriate" (251). To repair this deficiency—which we might already find to be unfairly attributed to Carroll<sup>9</sup>—Huddleston suggests that

[w]e as readers should be seen as having a *meta-level* discussion with the author about how the text is best read. We, in being good interlocutors, will try to discover what the author intended, drawing not just on the text itself, but on other information we have about the author (e.g. what we know of her political orientation or religious sympathies). This is what we imagine her 'saying' to us. But then we can think of ourselves saying, 'Well, what about his interpretation?'

Huddleston believes that under his view "our voices, as it were, stand a chance to be heard.... Our opinions can matter." But, we might wonder, "matter" *how*, and *to whom*? Absent good answers to such questions, Huddleston risks failing by his own standards.

Consider first the issue of mutuality. Huddleston seems to take the "exchange" between interpreter and artist to be mutual in that the artist first has his say via the work (and any external evidence that is adduced) and then the interpreter has hers via her critical comments. But the interpreter's "contribution" clearly does not constitute genuine communication, even if we think that the artist's does. The problem is not that the artist never comes to hear what the interpreter has to say. It is that there is no possible *critical* channel in which such communication may take place, and the interpreter knows this. For even if what she says happens to find its way back to the artist—given that many artists read criticism—this is an accident as far as criticism is concerned. Criticism is

9. See Jannotta (2014) for a defence of Carroll as a moderate intentionalist, one who allows that intentions may fail. I take Huddleston's objection to be somehow sensitive to the affinities I have been pointing out between moderate intentionalism and absolute intentionalism, namely in what appears to be their common account that intentions are critically relevant by being the *target* of interpretation.

not addressed to the artist in the way that his personal correspondence is. At best, criticism is addressed to a readership of potential *consumers* of the artwork, but even this is difficult to view as a “conversational” activity, for there equally is no critical channel for consumers to respond to critics.<sup>10</sup>

But even setting aside mutuality, it is not clear what would determine that the putative conversation is, in Huddleston’s terms, open—namely, how the contributions of each participant could “matter.” Huddleston might advert to his notion of “how the text is best read,” so that the contributions of each participant are judged to “matter” in terms of how closely they approximate this reading. But Huddleston is not very forthcoming about how he understands the notion of a “best” reading.

He may have in mind something like “aesthetically best.” This appears to be the case in his discussion of *Plan 9*, with respect to which he proposes a “conversation” between interpreter and Wood in which the former acknowledges Wood’s intentions but then makes her own suggestions which are said to matter more in virtue of being “more interesting.”

For in a real conversation, I can be aware of my interlocutor’s intentions, and can nonetheless suggest a better, or a more interesting possibility. This inventive [avant-garde] reading of Wood is rather like taking a dim idea from a not-very-talented person, and transforming it into a thought that is more interesting to think about and discuss. (253)

This looks like a variant of value-maximization theory—hence consistent with such of my view as I have so far discussed—but, perhaps for just this reason, also raises questions about the relevance of the notion of “conversation.” Carroll takes the artwork to be something like the artist’s utterance, and partly constitutive of the conversation. Huddleston says things to this effect, but, if he really believes them, flirts with inconsistency. For, as I say above, it is a conversational norm to take the meanings of utterances to reflect the speaker’s intentions. Moreover,

10. Cf. Isenberg (1949), who argues that a critic and her readers might experience a “‘communion’—a community of feeling which expresses itself in identical value judgments” (336).

nobody in ordinary conversation responds to his interlocutor by suggesting better (more interesting) meanings for *what she has just said*. This is surely a recipe for miscommunication and conversational failure (not to mention the alienation of one's conversation partners).

So Huddleston's proposal cannot quite treat the work as an utterance in the conversation. What he appears to have in mind is that the participants to the conversation are engaged in some sort of joint inquiry in search of the most interesting possible meanings. Aside from all else, this is to depart significantly from the basic structure of Carroll's analogy, which is an analogy to art experience. Huddleston's analogy, by contrast, is an analogy to art *interpretation*. This is confirmed by the way in which he speaks, e.g. of "this 'conversational' literary interpretation" and its "final hermeneutical result" (242).

The following is a relatively simple way to place Carroll and Huddleston with respect to each other. Carroll analogizes from *metaconversational* interests while Huddleston analogizes from *conversational* interests. The former, at least in cases of "fulfilling" conversations, are said to be interests to commune with and share in the perspective of an interlocutor. Carroll believes that consumers of art have similar interests with respect to artists. Conversational interests, meanwhile, are much like the sorts of procedural requirements from which Huddleston analogizes, having to do with the "mutuality" and "openness" characteristic of "fulfilling" conversation. Thus Huddleston believes that interpreters (not consumers) must be allowed to make contributions which furthermore "matter" to the outcome of the "conversation." This outcome is an interpretation (or an interpretive claim).

I have objected to Carroll on the grounds that, even if we somehow care about sharing in an artist's perspective, this is not relevantly like such of our interests in *conversation*, in which the character of the utterance is, unlike that of an artwork, more or less incidental. My objection to Huddleston is that the procedural requirements from which he analogizes simply do not apply to interpretation, if only because there are not "two sides" to an interpretation which may so be constrained. The interpreter is engaged in a more or less solitary activity, reflecting on his experiences and, if he is writing for an audience, hoping to make them accessible to others. It is unclear what is explained

by treating his *consideration* of the artist's intentions as a conversational activity (even if some sense could be given to such a proposition).

My suggestion, which I will explore in what follows, is that we maintain, with Carroll, that the interlocutors are indeed artist and consumer, but also, with Huddleston, that the "conversation" is relevantly interpretive. I propose to combine these ideas by treating the conversation not as *the whole of interpretation* but as *one sort of interpretive activity*. It is something undertaken by a critic *on behalf* of other parties—the artist and the consumer, respectively—rather than something to which the critic is *herself* a party. In other words, it is not that *the critic* is conversing, but that she is *imagining* a conversation, performing a sort of intellectual exercise.

### 5.3 *Critical Conversations*

I am talking now of times when life is being lived, not when it is being talked about, not when the intellect is holding the field. Then, of course, ideas can be formulated, can be passed from one mind to another. It is not easy, but it can be done with care, like handing round a pearl on which you wish an opinion to a circle of experts. You cup the palm to hold it, you keep the hand very steady. No such caution is possible when one is really living. Then there is no conversation.

– Rebecca West<sup>11</sup>

The critic's job is to do what she can, within the prescribed limits of producing a piece of discourse, to facilitate experience of a given work. The statements she makes as part of such a discourse will accordingly be judged by the standard of whether they help her to fulfill this role, will thus themselves require (what we can perhaps call) "interpretation." This is somewhat precarious territory, for I do not wish to make of criticism a kind of secondary artwork (on pain of regress), at least not in its capacity as criticism. While some criticism certainly rises to the level of art, and may be so experienced, it does not do so *as criticism*. The situation is something like the reverse of that in which an artwork is put to pedagogic use, where the taking of an aesthetic point of view may not be

11. "There Is No Conversation." 1935. In *The Harsh Voice*, 85–175. J. Cape, 85.



essential.<sup>12</sup> To treat a piece of criticism as an artwork is thus to appreciate it for something other than its critical function.

Having issued this caveat, I reiterate that criticism crucially involves a distinctive use of language (or, more generally, manipulation of discourse). Isenberg approaches this point as follows:

The description of a work of art is seldom attempted for its own sake. It is controlled by some purpose, some interest; and there are many interests by which it might be controlled other than that of reaching or defending a critical judgment. The qualities which are significant in relation to one purpose—dating, attribution, archaeological reconstruction, clinical diagnosis, proving or illustrating some thesis in sociology—might be quite immaterial in relation to another. (1949, 331)

I extend this characterization not only, as does Isenberg, to the *interests* which control a description, but also to its discursive context. Isenberg appears not to go so far, for he claims of an isolated such description, “There are just twelve flowers in that picture,” that it is “without critical relevance.” It is not clear, however, on what grounds such an assessment could be made unless a discursive context is specified. One needs to be told what the statement is doing in its surrounding discourse.

Presumably, Isenberg is imagining a particular discursive context in which the given statement is indeed critically irrelevant. As Paul Ziff points out, “if someone says ‘P’s painting is disorganized,’ he is apt to be offering a reason why the work is bad ... [but] he need not be; this might be part of an answer to ‘Which one is P’s?’” (1966, 47). Similarly, one might report how many flowers are in a picture as a means of identifying that picture—in which case the report is likely to be critically irrelevant—or instead as part of one’s defence of a critical judgment to which it is somehow relevant that the picture has just that many flowers (the number might be aesthetically significant).

12. See, e.g., Mayhead (1965): “Now we cannot escape the fact that there are such things as examinations; nor can we ... consider whether literature is or is not a proper ‘Subject’ for them. What we should do, however, is remind ourselves that no great writer ever designed his work to be potential matter for the examiners of posterity” (3).

We encountered something like this more specific point in Olsen (2010), in which biography “as a historical discipline” is differentiated from biography “as a critical instrument.” The idea, as I would construe it here, is that one and the same biographical statement could in one piece of discourse be critically relevant, used to establish a critical point, and in another be critically *irrelevant*, used only to give some interesting historical background. How we can tell whether a given statement is one or the other, being used to establish a critical point or not, is what I propose to explain (albeit across a limited range of cases) in terms of the notion of conversation.

In the analogy I envision, the critic stages an imagined conversation between the artist and a potential consumer for the purpose of making intelligible, or fit for experience, a favoured interpretation. Since I take value-maximization theory to be roughly correct as a theory of interpretation, it is (in the ideal case) a value-maximal interpretation that is so made fit for experience. A given biographical statement is critically relevant if it is constitutive of this kind of structured discourse. I explain the details of such discourse in what follows, concluding with an extended example.

### 5.3.1 *The Nature of the “Conversation”*

Let me start with some brief remarks on what I take to be the kernel of truth in Carroll’s analogy. Consider the possibility of a “criticism of conversation,” namely a discursive practice that takes conversations as its subject in the manner in which criticism takes artworks as *its* subject. Just as there is a difference between engaging in conversation and engaging in *thought* (e.g. rumination) about conversation, so there is a difference between engaging in experiences of art and engaging in *thought* about such experiences. Something important we should desire from each type of thought is an analysis of the experience that helps us to get better at (or to get the most out of) having such experiences.

Frequently, one will look back on a past conversation with a very different attitude from that which one had *during* the conversation. One might begin to notice certain patterns, relations between things that were said, that one did not notice while keeping up with the flow of the conversation as a participant.

In such moments of rumination, one “plays back,” so to speak, the conversation in memory. The same, of course, is true of one’s experiences with art, that one “re-experiences” the work in memory (or in reality, which is usually much easier to do with artworks than with conversations) for the purpose of directing one’s attention to different things, putting into effect a subsequently learned mode of experience (or simply for pleasure).

I have said in objection to Carroll’s analogy that our typical metaconversational interests are not relevantly similar to our typical interests in engaging with art. But this is consistent with the idea I am now considering. For a “criticism of conversation” may operate relevantly similarly to the criticism of art even if the interests to which each is sensitive are different. The former sort of “criticism” will direct its readers to better satisfy the metaconversational interests of ordinary conversation, while the latter sort will direct *its* readers to better satisfy their interests in engaging with art, which, I have claimed, concern the taking of an aesthetic point of view.

A “criticism of conversation” is attentive to conversational experience as such, to what are the metaconversational interests of interlocutors. It notes that interlocutors have certain aims in mind when they enter into conversation, and that they go on to do certain things while in conversation to serve those aims. Its job is to optimize the ability of interlocutors to achieve those aims *through conversation*. Similarly, criticism of art is attentive to aesthetic experience as such, to the interests of consumers of art in taking the aesthetic point of view. It notes that such consumers have certain aims in mind when they engage with artworks, and that they go on to do certain things (i.e. experience in certain ways) to serve those aims while engaging with artworks. *Its* job is to optimize the ability of consumers of art to achieve those aims *through aesthetic experience*.

It might be wondered what is supposed to be the point of improvising such a conception of the “criticism of conversation” which has no institutional existence. People undoubtedly scrutinize their past conversations, but there is no distinctive such practice, like the criticism of art, to which one can point. Let me say in response that, though this is not quite the analogy I am proposing, I take it to be informative scaffolding. For it is easy to see why a critic of conversation might wish to structure his discourse *in the very form of his subject*,

as a conversation, if only to offer a model of that which he recommends to his readers. I think that the same may be true of a critic in the case of art, even though *her* subject—our engagement with art—is not quite “conversational.”

The effectiveness of such a rhetorical device owes to the fact that conversation is a familiar enough notion for other things to be made intelligible in terms of it, especially those which require adjustments of modes of experience. Most people know what it is like to realize that what they thought was going on in some past conversation differs significantly from what in fact was going on, and know what it is like to adopt a different attitude toward the person with whom, or subject about which, they so conversed. Critics, as people in the world, naturally gravitate toward availing themselves of explanations in terms of such experience, should it prove expedient. For instance, they may clarify that what one is disposed to think a work is “saying” is not really what it is “saying,” once the “message” is properly understood—thus availing themselves of the more familiar senses of the words I have enclosed in quotations. This does not yet settle the nature of how they are availing themselves of the familiar senses (i.e. whether it is an analogy), but it seems to me clear that they *do* in some sense so avail themselves.

In one sense of their doing so, what I focus on here, they are not unlike philosophers who use the dialogue form. Famous examples include, of course, Plato, Berkeley, and, more recently, John Perry (1978). This rhetorical choice is often a result of the author’s believing that the thoughts he wishes to express are best expressed in the form of a competition of voices, or are best assimilated by the reader in this complex form (as something dialectically arrived at, rather than simply assented to or dissented from). The philosophical method of considering objections and proposing replies—rather than simply proposing a view to which, from the beginning, the objections do not apply—is arguably a less direct way to accomplish the same thing.

To the extent that critics are to be seen as presenting “arguments” (e.g. for interpretive claims), this may be one way of understanding their use of a conversational rhetorical device. While I don’t wish to explain my view using the theoretical writings of actual critics, there are examples I could mention. One is a recent book on criticism by *New York Times* film critic A. O. Scott

(2016), which not only is structured partly in the form of dialogues between Scott and an imagined objector, but also, in one such dialogue, sets him up to defend the view that “the essence of criticism is conversation—a passionate, rational argument about a shared experience.” It is difficult for me to say how much this corresponds to what I have in mind, but at the very least it illustrates that the notion of conversation is something which critics find it worthwhile to keep at the forefront of their thoughts about their practice.

Crucial to my conception of critical conversation is the fact that it is the responsibility of a critic not only to *state* relevant truths about the work but to make them *intelligible* to her readers. By this I mean, more specifically, that she must present her critical conclusions in the form of recommendations as to experience.<sup>13</sup> Olsen (1987) makes something like this point in terms of a distinction between “illuminating” and “unilluminating” criticism:

Instead of taking any one critical practice as a point of departure in the attempt to characterize the types of inferential routes relevant to literary understanding, one might start off with an assumption that there is a distinction between *illuminating* and *unilluminating* criticism which is, at least in part, based on intuition.... The assumption [is] that a reader can recognize intuitively criticism which enhances his aesthetic appreciation of a work. (109)

Olsen defines an “inferential route” as “a set of supporting reasons which make [an] interpretive description an acceptable answer to ... a[n interpretive] question” (e.g. *what does such-and-such aspect of the work “signify”?*). I will adopt Olsen’s terminology of “inferential route,” but understand it to mean something slightly more general, not the supporting reasons themselves but the manner in which they are strung together, their “logic.” Thus, many different sets of

13. See Radford and Minogue (1981): “Of course, ‘understanding’ the text, and passing on that understanding, cannot be seen simply as a matter of scholarly expertise or factual knowledge... [Criticism] consist[s] in mediating between works of art and their audience; in making it possible for the reader to respond to the work, or where he can already respond perhaps without fully understanding the work, making the work more intelligible” (1–2). See also Tillotson ([1951] 1967): “Critics choosing [‘a helicopter view’] sometimes seem disembodied as well as remote. They forget the vividness of their responses when they were formerly exploring phenomena on foot” (15).

supporting reasons may employ the same (type of) inferential route. Moreover, because I am less interested in the reasons themselves than in the *statements* by means of which they are adduced, it will be equivalent for me to say that particular instances of an inferential route consist of a set of *statements* (which in some sense cumulatively answer a given interpretive question).

What makes inferential routes critically relevant is that they are routes to interpretive claims. They are part of a critic's defence of something, an interpretive claim, that is antecedently critically relevant. It might be asked why a defence of something critically relevant is itself critically relevant. The answer is that if something critically relevant is felt to *need defence*, in particular *within a critical context*, then it follows that any supplied defence fulfills, or attempts to fulfill, a critical function. Perhaps not every critically relevant statement so needs defence. For example, it is routinely supposed that some critically relevant statements are "obvious."<sup>14</sup> These are sometimes called descriptions, as opposed to interpretations, and defences of them might not *ipso facto* be critically relevant. But for interpretations there will almost always be an attendant *critical* need for a defence. Hence, anything that fulfills this function is fulfilling a critical function. "Conversation" is, I submit, one such inferential route, critically relevant when it is constitutive of a defence of an interpretive claim, and critically *useful* because it is a systematic means of composing *illuminating* criticism.

The first question to answer, however, is whether we can even identify something as a "route" of conversation (let alone an illuminating one). I have suggested that Huddleston acknowledges such a route in his procedural requirement of openness—viz. that the contributions of each participant must "matter"—which he seems to understand in terms of the notion of a "best" reading. His other procedural requirement is that of mutuality, a "back and forth" between the participants. Let me start my characterization of a conversational route in terms of suitable amendments of these requirements, which I take to be mostly appropriate.

The inferential route I am imagining does instantiate mutuality, for interpretive questions are answered by the critic in terms of a genuine back-and-forth.

14. See, e.g., Barnes (1988), especially chapters 2 and 3.

This is, however, made up of the critic's speaking now on behalf of artist, now on behalf of consumer, until the "hermeneutical result" is reached, i.e. the interpretive question answered. We may begin to say something about openness in terms of the metaconversational interests of each party. Take, first, those of the consumer. His metaconversational interest is to have the hermeneutical result *illuminated* for him, made fit for experience. That the work means such-and-such, or that such-and-such is the value-maximal interpretation, is less interesting to him than directives as to experience, which prime him to experience the work as meaning such-and-such. To provide such directives is, indeed, supposed to be the function of criticism, and thus it is criticism to which the consumer typically looks for help in this regard.

Consider one such scenario. The critic imagines a consumer to be naturally inclined to experience the work a certain way, but does not find that so experiencing the work is optimal. He accordingly constructs a conversational dialectic in which the consumer figure, fashioned so as to have initially experienced the work in the more natural way, demonstrates the disagreeable upshot of this more natural way. The latter is then countervailed through another perspective, perhaps that of the artist. The decision of who is to occupy the role of the consumer's interlocutor is made on the basis of a range of considerations having to do with what makes intelligible the mode of experience the critic is recommending (the result to which the critic wishes to guide the consumer, and the manner in which he wishes to do so).

One reason why the artist may be chosen is that she has intentions which are either "meaning-tracking" or "meaning-determining" (in the senses I defined in the third chapter). If the artist is astute about what makes for a correct interpretation (or what the critic feels does so), then she is suitable as an interlocutor on the grounds that she represents the perspective to which the critic hopes to guide the consumer. To track reasons of value-maximization is often to provide an intelligible path to the value-maximal result. The same is true of facts which enter into the very reasons why a meaning is value-maximizing. That which determines what is value-maximizing is likely to provide a means by which the value-maximal thing may be rendered intelligible (even if it is not itself so intelligible, about which more below).

In each case, intentions are mentioned neither as mere hypotheses nor simply for the content of what is intended (i.e. regardless of its being intended). They are instead mentioned *as the artist's intentions*, for this is the only respect in which they make the relevant contribution to the “conversation.” Mere propositions are not gambits in a conversation, absent a perspective to which they are attributed and an attitude that this perspective shows itself to take toward them (e.g. of having intended them).

Moreover, as I suggested near the beginning of this chapter, something similar may obtain with respect even to *unsuccessful* intentions, those which do not “match” the work (or do so but “accidentally”). For the critic may wish to use the artist as a foil in a conversation designed to lead the consumer *away* from certain modes of experience. She might find that the best (or at least a very good) way to illuminate certain experiential dead ends is by erecting the figure of the artist as their defender, should facts about the artist provide promising material with which to do so. In this way, the intuition may be vindicated that unsuccessful intentions could also be critically relevant. The relevance comes from the critical *use* to which they are put, rather than from some independent relation between such intentions and (what we may more abstractly identify as) what the work means. Arguably, no interesting such relation obtains if the intentions in question truly are unsuccessful.

But here a familiar objection will rear its head. The critic need not advert to any *actual* such person as the artist. She may simply *invent* a figure with whom to put the consumer into dialogue. Sometimes it will be difficult even to differentiate her doing the latter and her doing the former, and, what's more, the difference might not matter very much if her adverting to the actual artist is insensitive to *its being the actual artist* to whom she is adverting—if the conversation would be more or less the same with a fictive artist instead. This poses an obvious problem. If there is no identifiable *critical* difference, in terms of making interpretations intelligible, between advertence to a fictive artist and advertence to the actual artist, then (actual<sup>15</sup>) intentionalism would seem not to

15. This would not affect the view known as “hypothetical intentionalism,” which I have not discussed at all. See Levinson (1992) for an articulation of this view. As I see it, hypothetical intentionalism is not relevantly an intentionalist view given that it is not about the actual



be vindicated.

It might be thought that one very easy way to respond is in terms of “meaning-determining” intentions, for with these it appears to matter that the *actual* artist intended the content that is recruited for the critic’s imagined conversation, i.e. if she didn’t intend it, then it wouldn’t be what the work means. Intentionalists standardly make such claims on the basis of expansive theories of meaning which in some manner identify what a work means with what the artist intended. I have been resisting such theories on the grounds that they are difficult to motivate, but earlier granted a place for “meaning-determining” intentions within an overall value-maximization theory, namely as those intentions which are partly determinative of the value-considerations which more directly determine meaning.

Whether or not this sort of response is felt to be adequate depends upon what one takes to be the nature of the “defence” a critic must offer for her interpretive claims. One might require of a critic either that she *explain* what makes a given interpretive claim correct or that she render this claim *intelligible*. To do the former is to adduce the facts in virtue of which the interpretive claim is correct. To do the latter is to enable the reader to experience the work in accordance with the interpretive claim. It seems to me that only the latter sort of “defence” is the proper concern of a critic (at least by virtue of the function of her practice). The first, which is given a lot of attention in such discussions, is more a subject for the metacritic, whose job it is to inquire into the theoretical underpinnings of correct interpretations.

A critic should, of course, defend only *correct* interpretations—for otherwise it is not clear what sense could be given to calling interpretations correct. But the sort of defence she must give of such interpretations is not that which metacritics must give. The critic performs the function of passing on correct interpretations so that a consumer of the work can apply them to his experience of the work. What this requires is the ability to correctly experience works and then direct readers to have similar experiences. This is a practical skill more than a theoretical one, involving the making of a sensible recommendation

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intentions of the actual artist. See Stephen Davies (2006) for an assessment along the latter lines.

rather than the explaining of what makes any given recommendation sensible.

When, therefore, it is proposed that facts about the artist achieve critical relevance through determining (to whatever extent) the meaning of the work, it must be asked how such determination is relevant to the critic's task as just described. For one might object that relations of determination are a subject only for the metacritic, answering as they do questions of what makes an interpretation correct. It is not clear, the objector will continue, how they furthermore enable a critic to make an interpretation intelligible—to compose, that is, illuminating criticism. Granted, the fact that a piece of criticism is illuminating cannot be unrelated to the fact that it trades in correct interpretations (at least if value-maximization theory is to be believed), but it is a further question whether an explanation of what makes an interpretation correct will serve equally to render that interpretation intelligible.

This is why being told merely that an artist-figure is recruited by the critic does not settle the question of whether its being *the actual artist* is critically relevant, even if facts about the actual artist determine work-meaning. The objector believes that, whether or not a critic happens to be talking about the actual artist, what is critically relevant, in terms of intelligibility, is only the perspective itself, so that there is no critical difference between the situation in which the critic makes use of the actual artist and that in which she makes use of some fictive corollary—as long as the features of the recruited perspective are the same. The intentionalist must accordingly describe a critical relevance for biographical facts that distinguishes them from their fictive corollaries.

I have an answer to this, and it begins from the observation that it is essential to the logic of a conversation not only that there *be* two sides—or even, as Huddleston contends, that there be mutuality and openness between them—but also that the two sides be properly *responsible* for their respective utterances. A conversation is an exchange between two or more persons such that what each says properly redounds to him as something for which he is held responsible going forward. Each is *responsive* to the other and, in addition, *expects* such responsiveness *from* the other. This is entailed by each party's having something at *stake* in the conversation. This, in turn, may be understood in terms of the attribution of tangible metaconversational interests. There must, that is, be a

reason why each party is engaging in the conversation.

I have already explained the metaconversational interests of the consumer. Those of the actual artist may be described as follows. The artist has created a work for which she has certain prescriptions. While she might not wish to “legislate” how the work is to be experienced (even if she had any such authority), and may be happy to allow it to be taken as the consumer wishes, she will at least have preferences in this regard (would, e.g., feel uneasy if made aware of her work’s being treated in certain ways as opposed to others). This is one sort of stake she has in engaging in a conversation about her work. She occupies a perspective which defines a range of possible experiences with respect to the work. But she also has another sort of stake, which we may summarize in terms of the reasons why she *created* the artwork at all—what motivated her to do what she did, the ideas she wished to express and why she held them to be important, and so on.

It is true that a fictive profile of such an artist may be constructed, more or less identical to what the actual artist thinks and feels—and maybe also that it is sometimes better for a critic to use the former rather than whatever may be pieced together about the latter (assuming the critic does not practice any deception, etc.)—but I maintain that there is still, at least sometimes, a *critical difference* between doing this and attending to the actual artist. In cases in which the artist has, say, “meaning-tracking” intentions, a particular sort of artistic profile emerges, along with a particular sort of conversational trajectory, in which, most importantly, the artist’s perspective is given priority and allowed to lead the conversation. It may be countered that a fictive artist can be constructed with just such attributes. But then what we are doing is *modelling the fictive artist on the actual artist*.

The significance of this is as follows. I have been making, on the objector’s behalf, a very natural sort of argumentative move that I must now question. This move takes it as obvious that if a set of facts about the actual artist and another set of relevantly similar facts about some fictive artist are each taken to be critically relevant, then the former’s relevance cannot be due to its concerning *the actual artist*. But this will not hold in all cases. It depends on how the fictive artist is constructed. If its construction is responsive to what the actual artist is like, to

what makes the actual artist astute about value-considerations, then, even if it is a fictive rather than an actual figure whom the critic puts into conversation with the possible consumer, its relevance is parasitic on the relevance of the actual artist. The reverse of this case is the one on which the objector has been focusing, in which the reasons why the actual artist is mentioned *are* insensitive to its being the actual artist who is mentioned. But the route of conversation I am advocating is of the former sort, in which the manner in which the actual artist relates to possible ways of experiencing the work is central to the perspective which the critic wishes to put into dialogue with the consumer. So any fictive artist constructed to emulate such an artist is thereby latching onto the latter's relevance.<sup>16</sup>

This, I admit, will not convince everyone. It might still be felt that there is no real critical difference between an actual artist, however astute, and a qualitatively identical fictive corollary. I have two things to say in response to such residual skepticism. The first is that I do not take it to present a serious obstacle, for the sort of relevance I aim to secure for the artist is, ultimately, *contingent*, vindicating of intention-talk that makes inexpugnable reference to intentions but perhaps in a way that extends to fictive corollaries. This is similar to a concession I made in the third chapter, in response to worries that other things, besides intentions, may track meaning or exert the relevant cultural influence. That fictive corollaries also count as critically relevant need not be construed as grounds for a *reductio* to the effect that neither they nor the actual artists from which they are constructed should then be viewed as critically relevant. It might instead be accepted at face value, as the result that, indeed, *both* are critically relevant.

The other thing I wish to say, perhaps more congenial to intentionalists, takes me back to what I earlier called the "agency argument."<sup>17</sup> Behind this argument was an intuition that a meaning must be *somebody's* meaning, which

16. Such a choice may be made for a number of reasons, for instance that the reader is likely to get the most out of the perspective of the actual artist, which will certainly be the case if the critic has chosen that artist's oeuvre as the relevant background range of works (and wishes to equip the reader for future works by the same artist). Even if this perspective is not directly employed, it will serve as a model for that of a fictive artist.

17. See p. 52 above.

I ended up explaining in terms of this meaning's being attributable only to a work that is the product of relevant instances of that somebody's intentional activity. I propose here to make use of the latter explanation to foreground a legitimate critical interest in the artist, who may be viewed thereby as assuming a sort of ownership over the artwork's meanings, in virtue of its being his intentional activity that accounts for the work's being interpretable at all. This, again, does not entail that his intentions will *fix* what the work means, but it does make him suitable as an interlocutor with attendant responsibilities and a stake in what is, after all, *his* work.

So much for the artist-figure. What about the consumer-figure, who *really* is a fictive sort of figure? Do any problems arise in making use of *this* fictive figure, instead of some actual consumer? While it is standard in philosophical theories to speak of "ideal" observers or perceivers (as Wollheim does), this is not the sort of fictive figure in which I am interested. For I do not make use of such a notion to define what a work means. I use it only to define a sense of critical relevance. Allow me now to finish the thoughts on which I embarked in the third chapter.

As I maintained earlier, the nature of the possible consumer is largely up to the critic. But there are two main sources of constraint, one abstract and one very practical. The latter is that of her readership. The critic is addressing a particular audience, i.e. the sort of person she imagines will be reading what she writes. She may write partly for posterity, and partly in terms of what she knows of past audiences, but largely it is a contemporary activity, undertaken in the light of cultural and artistic developments that have led to the work's interest for a contemporary audience. The critic writes, moreover, with a sensitivity to the venue, to the character of the publication to which she is submitting her piece (should this be how she promulgates her criticism). Typically, acknowledgements are made about such things when a piece of criticism is republished and the contemporary reader cannot be expected to understand the circumstances in which it originally appeared. Such understanding is important for a coherent sense of, among other things, who the critic is addressing as a potential consumer of the work, so that the critic's recommendations can be correctly applied.

A good example of such recontextualization is Paul Fussell's introduction to *Reviewing the Forties* (1978), a collection of Diana Trilling's literary criticism from her tenure at *The Nation* in the 1940s. Fussell, writing in the late 1970s, attempts to create a bridge between the circumstances in which Trilling was writing and (what for him was) a contemporary audience. His first sentence reads, "The context of this book is the culture of the nineteen-forties," and is followed by a rehearsal of the relevant touchstones, e.g. "the Andrews sisters," "*The Road to Morocco*," an ad featuring "a mother at her doorstep looking up from a telegram" (v-vi). This leads Fussell to questions such as, "what did people want to believe in the forties? What struck them as important?" (ix). His answers concern not only the art which Trilling was reviewing—novels which "explore[d] the degree of dishonor attaching to 'the parasitical professions': advertising, the vending of cosmetics, commercial radio"—but also her manner of reviewing it. "Her theme," according to Fussell, "is the threat of monomanias and systems and theories and sentimentalities to fiction" (xi).

To become aware of this as a reader in the 1970s is perhaps to take a view of Trilling's sensibilities that is different from the one that the contemporary culture would have encouraged. Fussell reminds us "of the moral sense that most people in the forties, swept up in a war, exercised instinctively," and contrasts it with the contemporary sensibility which "tends to invoke 'style' as its main criterion of the interesting" (xiv). (A critic's "criterion of the interesting" is, of course, very much a function of her surrounding culture.) Lastly, and this is significant for my claims about "venue," Fussell also places *The Nation* in the cultural landscape of the 1940s: "In rural reaches it was thought wickedly radical, or, to put it another way, offensively 'New York'; and I remember finding no copy on any newsstand in the whole of Georgia, Texas, and Arkansas during 1943 and 1944" (viii).

Such facts may seem too incidental or ephemeral to be accorded the theoretical role that I seem to be giving them, but to the extent that a piece of criticism may be substantially different, including different in terms of the possible consumer imagined by the critic, depending on the environment in which it appears, such practical considerations seem to me theoretically significant. Trilling writing in the 1970s is not Trilling writing in the 1940s, and how

we understand what she says on any given occasion should be sensitive to the people she is addressing and the natural audience of the publication for which she is writing.

I say I do not take these considerations to define what a work means because there is a difference between a critic's having said something critically relevant and her having hit upon a correct interpretation. Bad criticism is still criticism, and a poor defence of an interpretive claim (or a good defence of a false interpretive claim) is still a defence of an interpretive claim. My interest here is in distinguishing the critic's having said something critically relevant from her not having done this—whether or not, as a separate matter, she is practising good criticism. It admittedly would not be a very satisfactory way to answer anti-intentionalism if it should turn out that intentions *are* recruited for genuine criticism but always (or most of the time) for *bad* criticism. Indeed, this is not what I argue. But it would be sufficient, for Beardsley and Wimsatt's objection is not to poor criticism. It is to something which merely masquerades as criticism (viz. "writing the personal as if it were the poetic").

To the extent that there may be good criticism and bad criticism of the sort I describe, I must, it seems, say something about the norms governing a critic's having made a *good* choice of possible consumer. This is the more abstract sort of constraint. I appeal here, to begin with, to standard intuitions about misjudging one's audience. Olsen describes something like this during his elucidation of the distinction between illuminating and unilluminating criticism. He calls a certain interpretation unilluminating on the grounds that "the inferential route which it employs goes via an esoteric theory of literature which requires the reader to make specific assumptions he would not otherwise make" (1987, 117). While Olsen acknowledges that the interpretation in question is "perceptive, imaginative and intelligent," he objects that "its point is obscure: it does not enhance our appreciation."

But suppose the critic has imagined the possible consumer to be one who will have the requisite esoteric knowledge. Olsen defines esoteric knowledge as "knowledge which it is unreasonable to suppose is accessible to more than a small group of the literary community because it can be acquired only through special skills or with special tools" (118). But, as I say, maybe the critic has

defined his possible consumer in terms precisely of such a “small group.” As it happens, Olsen is talking about Harold Bloom in *Poetry and Repression* (1976), in which case I think it is safe to say that the critic is writing for an unusually learned audience (more learned, probably, than the average reader of the work in question). This alone doesn’t allow Bloom to evade Olsen’s objection, but it at least gives rise to a further question about Bloom’s rhetorical choices.

While Bloom’s interpretation might well be illuminating for the possible consumer he is imagining, this is not, we might think, the possible consumer he *should* be imagining. Such is the sense in which it seems that it is not *entirely* up to a critic whom he imagines to be the possible consumer. Although a critic is, of course, free to imagine what he likes, there will be norms on *good* criticism which determine which sort of consumer is most appropriate for which sort of work. This might still be sensitive to contextual factors such as I have mentioned—e.g. the time at which the critic is writing, with a consciousness of what else in the culture—but will certainly have to take into account the sorts of value-considerations I discussed in the third chapter, namely what maximizes the work’s value in the context of the most sensible background range of works, how the work has been read in the past (i.e. what histories of experience have accumulated with respect to that work), and so on.

So much for decisions about the possible consumer. Let me now say a little about the substance of the conversation. I have, in the previous few passages, been speaking very generally about the demands of criticism. To the extent that my analogy from conversation describes a genuine critical activity, it does, of course, have to meet such demands, which merit independent attention. But the specifically *conversational* nature of my proposal arises from *how* the two perspectives I have described, that of the artist and that of the possible consumer, are dialectically related by the critic.

The main thing I have said about this so far has involved the metaconversational interests of each side. As I noted in my initial discussion of such interests, they substantially inform what I called conversational interests, those which motivate us to do certain things *in* conversation. I have, moreover, tied the latter to Huddleston’s procedural requirements of mutuality and openness, and claimed that there is an ambiguity in Huddleston’s proposal having to do with



the trajectory of the conversation, how each side's contribution can be said to "matter."

Huddleston posits a "hermeneutical result" at which the conversation aims, and we may take this to give some definition to the conversational trajectory. Artist and consumer will naturally have their own perspective on this result. The artist wishes a given result established so that it satisfies her standing interests in having her work be taken in certain ways as opposed to others. The consumer wishes a given result established so that it satisfies *his* standing interest to derive aesthetic satisfaction. The critic must negotiate these demands in staging a conversation that yields what *she* takes to be the *correct* hermeneutical result.

Given the described relationship between metaconversational interests and conversational interests, what each side is made to say in the conversation will be determined not only by the sorts of procedural requirements Huddleston mentions but also by the relevant metaconversational interests—in addition, of course, to the truth about the artist (for reasons mentioned above). A critic's reporting that the artist had such-and-such beliefs should be deemed critically relevant in the context of any such conversational dialectic only if a case can be made that such of the artist's beliefs are plausibly expressed in support of her perspective (as this is understood by the critic). The sort of "support" at issue is left deliberately vague, for we might be talking of arguments establishing a given hermeneutical result or simply of a clarification of the artist's motives—why the artist is invested in the work being taken *this* way rather than *that*.

Likewise, what the possible consumer is made to say will be determined by facts about how a person such as him needs to position himself with respect to the work in order to experience it correctly. If this consumer is given certain attributes which, say, prevent him from so experiencing the work, he will naturally raise certain questions, object in certain ways, when presented with statements of a certain sort by the artist. He might, ultimately, offer resistance to the artist's perspective, or acquiesce to it, depending on what the critic finds appropriate. As I say above, the nature of this consumer is usually determined by the critic's sense of who will be reading her. More specifically, what a critic takes to be the natural perspective of such a reader is likely to be what she thereby attributes to the possible consumer, for her aim, as a critic, is to allow

the reader to imaginatively occupy the position of this consumer. In such a way, perhaps, the reader of the criticism “simulates” the conversation—if not literally, which would be unusual, at least in the sense that certain common questions, which the reader may or may not happen to have, are posed to the artist as if on behalf of the reader. If the reader happens not to have these questions, he might, simply by identifying with a perspective that is designed to be easy to identify with, come to be inquisitive in the way that the critic hopes.

It is difficult to speak with any greater precision here, since such things are handled in different ways by different critics, and often it is not quite so explicit as I am making it sound. The ideal case is, of course, that of an explicit dialogue, but the demands of readable prose, among other stylistic constraints, make this unsuitable. In what follows, I present a series of examples, all concerning a certain work by H. G. Wells, that demonstrate in degrees how the rhetorical device I have been describing is actually used by critics.

#### 5.4 *Wells and Moreau*

There are certain affinities between the case of H. G. Wells and that of Ed Wood, the other artist to whom I have devoted such a section. Both specialize in science fiction, and with respect to both it has been a subject of interest how one is to think of their work as art. Also common to both is that the way critics refer to them has been a constantly changing proposition, different for the early critics and for the later ones.

But there are also important differences. Wood is universally regarded as incompetent at his craft, a failed artist. Wells, on the other hand, is universally regarded as supremely talented, an inaugurator of genres (if historically disreputable ones). One significance of this is that, while it is very unlikely that Wood had any “meaning-tracking” intentions, it is, by contrast, very *likely* that Wells had such intentions. This, I have been saying, affects how and why critics are interested in an artist.

The work on which I will focus is *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), partly because it occupies an interesting juncture in Wells’s oeuvre. He had achieved great success with his first work, *The Time Machine* (1895), but had not yet

consolidated the reputation he would enjoy upon the publication of *The War of the Worlds* (1898). As we will see, those who appreciated the former work were not unanimous in their approval of *Moreau*, and the reasons they offered began to involve speculation about the author. Such a thing often occurs as an artist builds up an oeuvre. With a first work, usually very little of substance is said about him as such (unless he is already famous for some other reason). When he is mentioned, it is usually *pro forma*, couched in what Beardsley would call “merely verbal” intentionalistic language. This indeed appears to be a common feature of the early criticism of *Moreau*.

Chalmers Mitchell, writing in the *Saturday Review* the year the work was published, opens his piece as follows:

Those who have delighted in the singular talent of Mr. Wells will read *The Island of Doctor Moreau* with dismay.... He has given us in *The Time Machine* a diorama of prophetic visions of the dying earth, imagined with a pitiless logic, and yet filled with a rare beauty.... [But] Mr. Wells has [in *Moreau*] put out his talent to the most flagitious usury.... The usurious interest began when the author, not content with the horror inevitable in his idea, and yet congruous with the fine work he has given us hitherto, sought out revolting details with the zeal of a sanitary inspector probing a crowded graveyard. (Parrinder 1972, 43–44)<sup>18</sup>

In his very first sentence, Mitchell defines both the possible consumer and something of the trajectory of the ensuing interpretation. The possible consumer is one who has “delighted in the singular talent of Mr. Wells” (namely, one who has read and enjoyed Wells’s earlier work), and she will be encouraged to experience *Moreau* in a register of disappointment. Much of Mitchell’s review is geared toward making intelligible such disappointment.

His main point, evident in the quote, is that the horror in *Moreau* is unduly amplified with “revolting details,” unlike a certain other work (*The Time Machine*) in which the horror is more balanced. Wells is invoked as the author who understood his task differently across the two works. When Mitchell goes

18. All subsequent citations of the early criticism refer to this Parrinder anthology.

on to talk of “the blood that Mr. Wells insists upon forcing on us,” though there is a sense in which the interpretive claim is simply about “the blood ... [that is being] forc[ed] on us,” the image of Wells *forcing* it on us is crucial to make intelligible the sort of attitude Mitchell wishes us to adopt.

He invokes Wells in slightly different terms at the end of his review, when he brings up certain factual concerns about the science represented in *Moreau*. He describes an appended note in which Wells claims a scientific credibility for the procedure of vivisection practised by the title character, objecting that Wells overstates his case, that there is not in fact very much credibility to the depicted procedure (45–46). This is certainly a factual mention of Wells, of what Wells *actually said*, and the point being made is crucially expressed as a *disagreement* with Wells. We would not adequately be reconstructing the point if we omit mention of Wells and treat Mitchell as merely expressing skepticism about the realism of the depicted procedure.

But is this disagreement critically relevant, even supposing that it substantively implicates Wells? It is difficult to say. Some philosophers believe that the factual claims expressed in an artwork can be aesthetically relevant (and thus fitting objects for critical interest).<sup>19</sup> But here it is an appended note through which Mitchell is treating such factual claims. He is disagreeing with *external commentary*, not with the work itself. He is not saying, for instance, that *the work* contains within it a claim as to the scientific credibility of the depicted procedure. This may separately be true,<sup>20</sup> but we do not hear about it from Mitchell. It is possible, I suppose, for a critic to treat such of Wells’s statements as partly definitive of his perspective on the work, and then to put such a perspective into dialogue with an imagined consumer; but Mitchell does not seem to be attempting anything like this.

Another review from the same year, this one in *Spectator*, opens similarly, with an acknowledgement of “[t]he ingenious author of *The Time Machine*

19. See Mikkonen (2013) for a recent defence.

20. Cf. Atwood (2005), who reads *Moreau* as a fable: “the word ‘fable’ is suggestive, for—despite the realistically rendered details of its surface—the book is certainly not a novel, if by that we mean a prose narrative dealing with observable social life ... [and] it is quite apt, as no man ever did or ever will turn animals into human beings by cutting them up and sewing them together again” (386–387).

[who] has found in this little book a subject exactly suited to his rather peculiar type of imagination" (46). This itself is not a critical point—it is merely praise for an author—but sets up a particular sort of invocation of Wells-as-author. It is said that "the real value for literary purposes of this ghastly conception depends on the power of the author to make his readers realize the half-way stages between the brute and the rational creature ... [a]nd we must admit that Mr. Wells succeeds in this little story in giving a most fearful vividness to this picture" (47). This is a claim that Wells "succeeded" in his intention. We might, of course, ask: *how does the critic know? Is this not just a claim about what is good in the work, and the part about Wells's having intended it just irrelevant speculation?* Perhaps not.

The critic makes a claim for Wells's having had (what sounds an awful lot like) "meaning-tracking" intentions. He says that "Mr. Wells has had the *prudence*, too, not to dwell on the impossibilities of his subject for too long" (47, emphasis added). He may mean by this that Wells is astute about value-considerations, i.e. that Wells recognized that if he *had* dwelt on the impossibilities longer, he would have run the risk of making the work less valuable. True or not, this characterization of Wells appears to be offered as part of an attempt to make a certain recommendation as to experience (about the suspension of disbelief).

The critic goes on to make a further claim, that the "very slight, though ... very powerful and ghastly, picture" (of the title character's operations) is calculated to "render vivisection unpopular, and that contempt for animal pain, which enthusiastic physiologists seem to feel, hideous" (47).<sup>21</sup> This is probably a misreading of the work. (The editor of the volume from which I am quoting thinks so.) But it is, in any event, a nascent attempt to put the figure of Wells into dialogue with a possible reader, to use him to motivate a reading on which the untimely death of Moreau "has a kind of poetic justice in it which satisfies the mind of the reader." Here the statements about Wells (though perhaps false)

21. That it is so calculated (to "render vivisection unpopular") may not be deemed aesthetically relevant, if one does not think that such (what are called) perlocutionary intentions are aesthetically relevant. See, e.g., Wimsatt (1976). But what would certainly be deemed aesthetically relevant is that the work is of such-and-such a "ghastly" character.

seem at least critically *relevant*, adduced in reference to what “satisfies the mind of the reader.”

An unsigned review in *Speaker* understands the work as having a very different moral effect. The review opens, again, by praising Wells’s “originality,” and says of him that “he could interest a reader, even if his theme was comparatively commonplace” (50). But then there is a shift in tone:

the commonplace is evidently hateful to him, and he makes it his first business, when sitting down to write a story, to hit upon an idea that shall startle everybody by its extravagance and novelty. In the present instance he has achieved originality at the expense of decency (we do not use the word in its sexual significance) and common sense.

Then, equally abruptly, as if in response to an anticipated objection, the critic becomes defensive: “[w]e need not go further into the details of this delectable theme. Mr. Wells, as we have said, has talent.” Finally, in the last sentence, it is insisted that “talents are accompanied by *responsibilities*—a fact which Mr. Wells seems to have forgotten” (emphasis added).

Here the critic wishes to impress on the reader (of the criticism) the fact that a certain effect which Wells intended to create by means of his work, the way he wanted it to be experienced, is not in fact the way it *should* be experienced: we should shrink from, rather than delight in, “this delectable theme.” To make intelligible this recommendation, the figure of Wells (perhaps, again, more fictive than real) is erected, with attendant “responsibilities” against a sense of which the reader is to play off her own sensibilities. Whether or not we agree that Wells has failed in such of his responsibilities (or that he even has them), we may at least see such claims as critically *relevant*, to the extent that they are implicated in how the critic is attempting to defend the interpretive claim at issue. They are not extraneous remarks about Wells, incidental to the critical point.

A theme may be noticed across these examples. They are all scant on factual information about Wells and rife with speculation of the *what-must-the-author-be-like* variety. This could be a source of objection, for it might be held that

the invocations of Wells I have so far discussed are, not just potentially false, but only *deceptively* such invocations at all—that really they have nothing to do with Wells. Recall the view, discussed in the first chapter, that it is not an invocation of intention if it is something “reconstructed entirely from the data [of the work] which would in themselves serve equally well to limit the meaning” (Gang 1957, 182). I might thus be charged with misconstruing what the critics in question are doing. They are simply reflecting back on the work what they have already got out of it, not going outside of the work in an effort to illuminate it.

This is a question of how one analyzes the data I have presented. The foregoing is the anti-intentionalist’s analysis, summarizable in terms of Beardsley’s “merely verbal” category of intentionalistic language. Let me offer an intentionalist alternative. It seems to me that, though the critics in question are indeed making do with the “work itself,” this is not a reflection of the normal state of affairs—in which, the objector believes, the work itself is enough (or, at the very least, the *arbiter* of what is enough). In my view, the situation of the examples I have discussed is instead one in which normal protocols are curtailed. The critic wishes to talk about the artist, but conditions are not optimal for her doing so. This may obtain for a variety of reasons, some of which have already been mentioned: that it is *de rigueur* to not conduct biographical research on a “new” artist, that the biographical information is not relevantly accessible, and so on. But the same critics, with the same curiosities, would, I contend, “go outside the work” if conditions were more conducive to doing so.

The anti-intentionalist takes these critics to *really* be talking about the features of the work when they say that Wells had such-and-such attitudes: this is treated as shorthand for something like *such-and-such attitudes are expressed by the work*. But I would counter this suggestion with the following one of my own: the critic, in the absence of conditions that conduce to “going outside” the work, makes do with drawing *inferences* about the artist from the work. When she says that Wells had such-and-such attitudes, it is not shorthand for some claim about the work’s features but a claim *really* about the artist. Such claims just happen to be inferred on the basis of the work, rather than derived from external sources.

It might be objected that if it is an inference drawn *from* one's examination of the work then it cannot very well contribute *to* such an examination (on pain of circularity). This might in some sense be true, but I return to the sort of comment I made in resolution of the dilemma objection at the beginning of this chapter. In short, the critic may draw inferences from his examination of the work and then recruit such inferences for the critical task of making the work intelligible to his readers. Since the first task is distinct from the second, there is no circularity.

To substantiate my intentionalist analysis of what these early critics of *Moreau* are doing, let me consider a more recent critic, one for whom, I cannot deny, the conditions for biographical inquiry are indeed optimal, for Wells's status as an artist is now established and facts about his life and work have been extensively documented. The piece I will consider is by Margaret Atwood (2005), commissioned as an introduction to a recent Penguin edition.

In one of Atwood's initial discussions—an interpretation of the protagonist, Prendick—she alludes to *The Time Machine*, in which “human beings ... have split into two distinct races,” an upper class, the Eloi, consisting of “[t]witterers” who “have lost the ability to fend for themselves,” and the “working classes [which] have become vicious and cannibalistic” (388). Atwood reports that Wells did not sympathize with either class: “He must have felt he represented a third way, a rational being who had climbed up the ladder through ability alone, without partaking of the foolishness and impracticality of the social strata above his nor of the brutish crudeness of those below.” Her aim in mentioning this is to construct a certain perspective on behalf of the author, one which is then used to make intelligible Prendick as a character, in particular to defend the interpretive claim that “Prendick, though not quite as helpless as a full-fledged Eloi, is well on the path to becoming one.” We are thus encouraged to view Prendick's behaviour as manifesting the “foolishness and impracticality” of such an upper class. This, indeed, is how Atwood goes on to read him, calling our attention to “his hysteria, his lassitude, his moping, his ineffectual attempts at fair play, and his lack of common sense.”

This characterization is persuasive, however, only if, following Atwood, we view Prendick through the lens of Wells's sympathies. That is, Prendick's



behaviour looks like hysteria—rather than, say, vigilance—only under a certain way of experiencing his social class. There are two questions here. First: what makes it the case that Prendick manifests hysteria rather than vigilance? Second: what is the best way to make intelligible the fact that Prendick manifests hysteria rather than vigilance? It might be thought that the answer to the former straightforwardly delivers an answer to the latter, but this ignores the importance of criticism as a discursive institution with its own norms and protocols.

If value-maximization theory is correct, then the first question is to be answered mainly in terms of value-considerations, not of Wells's sympathies (unless the latter are somehow meaning-determining). Roughly: what makes it the case that Prendick manifests hysteria rather than vigilance is that experiencing the text as his manifesting hysteria makes it more valuable than experiencing the text as his manifesting vigilance. But to know this fact is not to know what would make it intelligible to a reader of criticism, or what would put a consumer in a good position to *appreciate* the sort of value at issue. I have claimed that, for this second sort of task, it is often appropriate to lead a reader through a dialectical process one side of which is the perspective of the artist.

Atwood makes use of such a rhetorical device at various points. After reporting Wells's views, her next sentence reads:

But what about Prendick, the narrator of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*? He's been pootling idly about the world ... is a "private gentleman" who doesn't have to work for a living, and, though he—like Wells—has studied with Huxley, he has done so not out of necessity but out of dilettantish boredom." (388)

We might wonder who is posing the initial question. It is not quite Atwood herself, neither her real self nor some writerly persona. It is instead, I think, an imagined consumer, who has just been "listening in," so to speak, on the rehearsed details of Wells's background and attitudes. The consumer, having such background and attitudes in mind, is shown to wonder how he is to view Prendick in the light of them. Atwood obliges by speaking again on behalf of Wells, for it is difficult otherwise to explain her peppering her exposition with

comparisons to Wells (e.g. the interjection of “like Wells”). The question/answer model, which has many discursive uses, is often a critic’s way of staging a dialogue. Short of explicitly using a dialogue form, which, as I have said, tends to be clunky and unsuitable as a prose style, the critic has to assume the relevant roles and integrate them into a seamless flow of what looks like ordinary exposition.

This is more obvious in other parts of Atwood’s piece. In discussing certain religious themes, Atwood mentions that

Wells called *The Island of Doctor Moreau* “a youthful blasphemy,” and it’s obvious that he intended Moreau—that strong, solitary gentleman with the white hair and beard—to resemble traditional paintings of God. (393)

So far there is no interpretive claim, and Beardsley would characterize this as “inexpugnably intentionalistic” language, hence as critically irrelevant. He would say that we are simply being told what Wells intended, not what the work means. If it is supposed to be a claim about the work, then we must, according to Beardsley, dig out “its *nonintentionalistic* meaning” (1958, 28).

However, as I have argued at various points, such a sentence could be both inexpugnably intentionalistic *and* critically relevant, namely if it is constitutive of a larger discourse which depends on it for *its* critical relevance. In fact, this is just the use that Atwood is making of it. She is recruiting Wells’s intention to help defend an interpretive claim concerning the status of Moreau as a God-figure. Atwood notes that Wells “surrounds Moreau with semi-Biblical language” and that “Moreau is the lawgiver of the island.” These facts are meant to be appreciated in terms of a perspective (Wells’s) which takes them to constitute “a youthful blasphemy.” The blasphemous element is introduced by Atwood in the following transition: “But [Moreau] isn’t a real God, because he cannot really create; he can only imitate, and his imitations are poor,” immediately after which, as if on behalf of the consumer, she poses the question: “What drives him on?” This is then answered in terms of Moreau’s “cold ‘intellectual passion.’” As before, it is not quite that Moreau is a God-figure in virtue of Wells’s having intended him to be one (or having intended his work to be a

youthful blasphemy), but that Wells is suitable to recruit as an interlocutor for a possible consumer who is being led to a certain way of experiencing the work (as a youthful blasphemy).

Consider, next, a passage that describes an allusion to the Trinity. I have emphasized what I take to be the interjections of the imagined consumer.

The third person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit, usually portrayed as a dove—God in living but nonhuman form. The third M creature on the island [after Moreau and his assistant Montgomery] is M'Ling, the beast creature who serves as Montgomery's attendant.... **The Holy Spirit as a deformed and idiotic man-animal?** As a piece of youthful blasphemy, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* was even more blasphemous than most commentators have realized. Just so we don't miss it, Wells puts a serpent beast into his dubious garden: a creature that was completely evil and very strong, and that bent a gun barrel into the letter S. **Can Satan, too, be created by man?** If so, blasphemous indeed. (2005, 394)

We may view this as leading to a consolidation of the interpretive claim that the work is a youthful blasphemy. Nothing further is reported about Wells here, but his perspective is extended in accordance with the demands of the conversation: important for Atwood is to say not just that one *finds* a serpent beast in the "dubious garden," but that Wells has *put it there*.

Let me conclude with a yet more complex example, still from Atwood. She devotes a short section to cat imagery and feminism, focusing on the fact that though there are "no female human beings on Moreau's island ... Moreau is busily making one," attempting "to turn a female puma into the semblance of a woman." Atwood leads her interpretation, which has not yet taken shape, with certain biographical facts:

Wells was more than interested in members of the cat family, as Brian Aldiss has pointed out. During his affair with Rebecca West, she was "Panther," he was "Jaguar." But "cat" has another connotation: in slang, it meant "prostitute." This is Montgomery's allusion when he says—while the puma is yelling under the knife—"I'm

damned ... if this place is not as bad as Gower Street—with its cats.”  
(395)

Here we see one very minor interpretive claim: that Montgomery is making such an allusion. For this, of course, the previous sentences about Wells and West are not needed. What, then, is the function of those sentences? Do they have a critical function? Atwood continues:

the puma resists.... It is she who kills Moreau.... Like many men of his time, Wells was obsessed with the New Woman. On the surface of it he was all in favor of sexual emancipation, including free love, but the freeing of Woman evidently had its frightening aspects. Rider Haggard's *She* can be seen as a reaction to the feminist movement of his day—if women are granted power, men are doomed—and so can Wells's deformed puma. Once the powerful, monstrous sexual cat tears her fetter out of the wall and gets loose, minus the improved brain she ought to have courtesy of Man the Scientist, look out.

There are two touchstones here: Wells's sexual attitudes, and Haggard's *She*. As far as Wells goes, the critical move is an attempt to read the puma's escape and subsequent killing of Moreau in terms of Wells's anxieties. Again, it is not quite that the suggested reading is true in virtue of Wells's having had such anxieties. The point, rather, is that the anxieties are effective for making the reading intelligible. What is “obvious” in the work is that the puma escapes and then kills Moreau. This could further “mean” a number of things. Atwood thinks it has certain (what we now consider) retrograde meanings, about what women are and what they could do. But to simply state such things as cold facts (“if women are granted power, men are doomed”) is not a good way to make them experientially come alive. This is why Atwood chooses to make them intelligible in terms of “a reaction to the feminist movement of [Haggard's] day.” The example of *She* does this further, giving a sort of template (for it does seem that *She* is easier to experience along the lines being suggested).

In many of her references to Wells, Atwood clearly is relying on what she takes to be facts about him. She is not inventing a figure on the basis of the

text and then reflecting that back on the text, nor, it is worth adding, is she allowing herself to be guided merely by her rhetorical purposes with respect to this one work. To do the latter may be to contravene some basic tenets of value-maximization theory, as I have developed it in the third chapter. For example, if one has in mind, as the relevant “background” range of works, some subset of Wells’s oeuvre (and maybe the works of Rider Haggard), then one’s sense-making activities, the recommendations one makes as to experience, must be constrained by a sense of how the consumer must relate to all of these works. If a critic’s idiosyncratic fictive artist has no bearing on anything other than this one work, *Moreau*, then it is to be judged the less effective for that.

## Conclusion

The intentionalism debate is unusual in that it was inaugurated by those who held a negative position. I describe how this played out, including the distortions it entailed, in the first chapter. Those who outlined a positive position in reaction to this negative position largely failed, I have claimed, to take account of what exactly the negative position is supposed to be. That is, intentionalists did not sufficiently attend to how their proposals are or could be objectionable to anti-intentionalists. In my definition of intentionalism, I have attempted to be so attentive, to look at what exactly Beardsley and Wimsatt found objectionable.

It is easy to get lost in the ambiguities of claims about “standards of interpretation,” in terms of which Beardsley and Wimsatt *do* couch some of their argument, but the debate comes down, essentially, to what we take critics to be doing when they talk about the intentions of the artist (or, more generally, about biographical facts). This is what it means to treat the question of interest as a *metacritical* question, one that is about the discourse of a critic *qua* critic. Although it may sometimes seem like Beardsley and Wimsatt are simply plucking out of the air abstract questions about intentions and meaning, they instead inherit an existing debate over biographical information which proceeds from the data of critical practice. They look at the way critics talk about works and find some of this talk objectionable.

Answers to metacritical questions must themselves be metacritical. If the anti-intentionalist makes claims about certain kinds of critical discourse, the intentionalist must likewise make claims about those kinds of critical discourse, at least to the extent that she wishes to disagree with the anti-intentionalist. Beardsley and Wimsatt say that there is a critical error of “writing the personal as if it were the poetic,” and identify what they take to be examples of this. The

intentionalist must, in response, counter the sorts of examples Beardsley and Wimsatt give, carve out a substantial enough space for such examples in which they do not count as erroneous.

As I detail in the second chapter, the absolute intentionalist proposes a theory of meaning which, if true, would vindicate *all* such instances of critical discourse. But this theory leads to a picture of criticism on which the critic is oriented toward the artist rather than toward the work, which is precisely the outcome to which Beardsley and Wimsatt are objecting. It might thus seem that we have a stalemate, one side objecting to that on which the other side insists, but I have given some reasons to think that the absolute intentionalist comes out the worse for wear. Although it is true that Beardsley and Wimsatt cannot simply *assume* that the personal may not be written as if it were the poetic, the absolute intentionalist must at least provide a sense of its being indeed *the poetic* that is being written under the guise of the personal. The absolute intentionalist, however, provides only a sense of writing the personal, and argues that this just *is* to write the poetic. Aside from being explanatorily unsatisfying, this also may seem to run against how critics actually do write the poetic.

It will be said that so much a *moderate* intentionalist could accept, and that it is only such an intentionalist who should be contended with, not an absolute intentionalist, given the development of intentionalism over the decades. But, as I say in the second chapter, it does not seem that moderate intentionalists have sufficiently reckoned with the problems of absolute intentionalism. They rightly take it to be a problem that absolute intentionalism fails to countenance the possibility of intentions failing (what I have called the misspeaking objection), but this is, in the grand scheme of things, a minor problem. I have argued that the way moderate intentionalists patch up absolute intentionalism in the light of the misspeaking objection does not rectify the more serious problem of the latter's untenable answer to how a critic's talk of intentions is talk of *the work*.

In my own answer to anti-intentionalism, I separate the question of *truth-conditions* from that of *relevance*. I observe that the former do not always deliver the latter, and that, indeed, it is possible in the intentionalism debate both to deny that intentions provide the former and to maintain that they achieve the latter. To write the poetic under the guise of the personal does not require that

the personal provides the truth-conditions for the poetic. All it requires is that there be acceptable discursive contexts in which critics may write the poetic under the guise of the personal.

Beginning in the third chapter, I accept a version of value-maximization theory as providing the truth-conditions for interpretive statements, and then develop (what I call) a metacritical intentionalism that attempts to secure a discursive relevance for intentions (and biographical facts generally) on the basis of the latter's relation to value-considerations. It is important to see, however, as I say at various points, that value-maximization theory is not essential to metacritical intentionalism. Some other theory could suffice, but *some* such theory must be held in order to properly explicate the workings of any such discursive relation as must be established. The discourse in question has to be *about* something, and it is not sufficient to say simply that it is about the meaning of the work, absent some account of what sort of thing this meaning is.

I am independently convinced by value-maximization theory, but also find, as I argue in the fourth chapter, that if it is taken to underlie the relevant metacritical intentionalism then we can see how facts about the artist could be relevant to a work's evaluation. To the extent that an intentionalist has intuitions to this effect, the choice of value-maximization theory is thus reinforced. Otherwise, it is not clear how such intuitions could be vindicated.

I tie up the loose threads of my view in the final chapter, in which I reconceive a niche view in the intentionalism debate, the "conversation" view, in terms of a discursive relation by means of which, I claim, critics attempt to write the personal as if it were the poetic. They do this by imagining a conversation between the artist and a possible consumer, for the purpose of defending and making intelligible some interpretive claim. I understand the making intelligible of an interpretive claim in terms of making it fit for experience, and tie this into a "defence" of the interpretive claim through, again, value-maximization theory, on which what a work means is a function of how valuably it is experienced under the proposed meaning. This is all the more reason for intentionalists who wish to adopt the methodology of metacriticism to accept value-maximization theory as the underlying theory of the truth-conditions for interpretive claims.



The solution I propose may be understood as answering Beardsley and Wimsatt in the following way. They point to various examples of criticism in which the critic says something like, “the artist intended such-and-such . . . and the work means such-and-such,” and take them to be instances of the critic’s making a sort of error, writing the personal as if it were the poetic (which Beardsley and Wimsatt think is impossible, or yields critical irrelevance). On my view, at least some such examples are to be understood in different terms, not as the critic’s simply inferring from the fact of an artist’s having intended some meaning that the work means that thing (or, if we do not wish to speak of inferences, as her simply *taking* the one to *be* the other), but as the critic’s attempting to make the given meaning intelligible for the reader in terms of what the artist intended. This is to be deemed criticism, as opposed to mere rhetoric or extraneous matter, partly due to its being criticism’s function to make meanings so intelligible, and partly due to the mentioned facts about the artist being interestingly bound up with the reasons why a meaning is correct (namely, by their being “meaning-tracking” or “meaning-determining”).

It will always be a question whether the critic is making an error, invoking the intention as a stand-in for the work’s meaning or as part of some complex rhetorical device, but much of the confusion can be avoided by examining the contextual features of the piece in question. It is easy to quote a single sentence (or even a few sentences) and make it seem like an error. But in many cases the critical function being performed by a given sentence can be discerned only by looking to the entire piece, to what the critic is attempting to do. Beardsley is attentive to such things in his distinction between “merely verbal” and “inexpugnable” uses of intentionalistic language, rightly noting that sometimes a critic mentions the artist or her intentions in a misleading way. But he does not discriminate as finely *within* the inexpugnable cases, some of which may indeed, in the manner I suggest (along with many others), constitute genuine criticism.

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